

JUKAI
TEISHO 4 SPRING SESSHIN 2009
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At the beginning of this sesshin we acknowledged the spirits of the land here. They're very talkative spirits, they do talk to us. And in that ceremony we touch the earth to remind ourselves where we come from and where we go back, and to let go of the idea or any dream that we are separate. We remember that we are the earth, we are all these amazing manifestations she brings forth - all beings. And really our practice is a small gesture in return for all that is poured out, only for our benefit.

Jukai is the ceremony of commitment to the Way and a way of saying 'thankyou'. The Way always remains simply the Way. You could say it's the natural grain of things, the Tao. To give yourself to this is not to be mistaken for joining an order, a religious order, or even becoming a Buddhist or turning more Zen, because that is impossible. You cannot turn Zen, even though Zen can turn you around.

But Zen is said to leave no trace. Deep Zen practice leaves no trace in us of itself. As Dogen says 'And this no trace continues ceaselessly.' That means practice goes on ever deeper into mountains - ever deeper into forgetting the self which is really knowing the self. When we forget who we are we recognize who we really are and so we rejoin the great community of beings, we agree to pay our dues, to come into accord, to make ourselves accountable.

Linji speaks of the true person of no rank. When you wear the rakusu, and take the whole journey of the rakusu, you learn both gradually and swiftly that this is in fact a *shedding* of any kind of special mark or rank. It is agreeing to know and more thoroughly realize this person of no rank. You have been touching that at different moments of this sesshin, that one who is no self at all or very little, with very little left to bother even the blowflies.

So Jukai is the step of making public the commitment to the Way. It is a fresh step, to make it public. Of course it is already strongly in you or you would not be sitting here. It's a little bit like a marriage, when a marriage takes place it's really marking something that is already clear to everybody and clearly felt. But making a public declaration of this matter is a dynamic move to make, it goes further, it says 'People who know me, please bear witness.' In stepping into this ceremony, we make ourselves accountable to each other and to all who hear us take our vows. And we ask you to welcome this commitment, this move of the heart, and to share the celebration.

So Jukai is a shared celebration, one we all go through together, welcoming this new depth of commitment which we feel in ourselves as well just by bearing witness. The vows in Zen are binding in the way that your heart makes clear to yourself. They are not external commandments coming from some other authority. They are personal and personalized undertakings you make in all honesty to your self, to take up the Way in the

particular way that each vow creates, of making room for the other and acting from genuine intimacy with the other. Really, each of the vows is the great Way in its entirety, even while each vow makes that fact more humanly clear.

To take these vows is to be guided by the spirit of the Buddha's words on loving kindness. If you look closely at those words, you will find the precepts manifested. They are also manifest the four Great Vows, that we have to make so frequently because we are a little prone to keep forgetting them. Those vows, and the precepts, are a light to our feet on the path.

But each of the vows that you now take is asking an ancient question of you - and of all of us who hear it. The implication is that we are all in this together so thoroughly that we each can hardly tell you from me, even while we must take full responsibility for our selves. And all of the vows really arise naturally from this fact, which is a generous and life-giving fact. We say, in each of the vows, effectively, 'I will not live at the expense of others. And also, can I truly love what I am doing if it is doing harm to another?'

So it is a kind of process of becoming a little more reliable. Can the earth rely on you?

Thich Nhat Hanh asked that question of the earth and of himself in the context of global warming, in a kind of quiet conversation with the earth - which he called nature. He says, 'I asked nature, can we rely on you, given what is happening?' And nature very interestingly replied to him, 'Can I rely on *you*?' Thay says he looked deeply into himself, and he finally replied, 'You can *mostly* rely on me' - an honest human being. And nature replied to Thich Nhat Hanh, 'And you can mostly rely on *me*.'

'Mostly' is important. We are not saints, you will be glad to learn that you are not, right now, becoming a saint! We are human, and mistakes happen. In fact the mistakes seem to have something to do with us - often! Witness this morning. Each mistake can uncover fresh miracles, as we also discovered today.

So the vows are like that, aware of the miracle of mistakes. They are also koans. As koans, they ask of us not obligations so much as freedom. They demand our deepest freedom. They point to the timeless centre of yourself and of the world, which is the same. And in that centre, as John Tarrant sometimes says, we walk alone in the old moonlight, hardly remembering even our own names.

And yet the ceremony of Jukai also involves the bestowing of a new name, a dharma name. A dharma name is a personal expression of your particular character and deep experience, but it is also very big because it points to how much room there always is to practice more deeply. In other words, anyone who walks the Way needs a name that is much bigger than they are in their most ordinary sense, a roomy name, a name to grow into. When I was a child I was often wearing clothes a few sizes too big because they came down from my sister and my job was to get busy and grow into them. In fact my sister is still handing down something like this to me, although she has not been alive for more than twelve years.

Well here it is, a name too big to grow into, wonderfully fitting as well. And the names also join us back to the tradition like a great tree of which we are one twig. A dharma name connects us to the spirit of the ancestors who have walked the Way before us, and the giving of it by a teacher joins you to that lineage, a bloodline from the Buddha.

So the ceremony of Jukai is you saying in your innermost self, 'Whatever happens, through thick and thin, I am now one who walks the Way, damnit' - which means you undertake to see things just as they really are, and to help them be the best they can be, even if this means outing yourself out. Which it will, in the best way.

So will all those who wear the rakusu, please remove the rakusu, because we all go through this together with you.

CEREMONY OF JUKAI WITH KEITH CONTINUES