

Shoken, Jukai, Tokudo

Keizan Scott Sensei

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In this talk Keizan Sensei explains three stages of practice - Shoken, personal commitment to a teacher, Jukai, receiving the precepts in a public ceremony, and Tokudo, ordination - and his expectations of the zen student in making these commitments.

Shoken

[Start of talk missing! About five minutes or so, in which KS explains basically what shoken is - a ceremony in which one formally enters the student/teacher relationship, makes a personal commitment to the teacher or the student. Also KS explained that the short shoken ceremony done in private during a daisan session, and that if a student wants to do shoken, he or she must ask the teacher to accept her or him as a student.]

I don't do the work - my role in you doing that work is to respect and to protect your psychological and spiritual integrity so that it's totally between you and me. Basically, I hold the seat for you in that respect.

On the other hand, I may ask you to do either explicit things or implicit things, and I would expect you to pick up on that, without me spelling it out, so part of the obligation of a student-teacher relationship is that you pick up on, without it being said very clearly, what it might be that is expected of you of that maybe you should change your behaviour about or toward, or whatever. And that brings me then to the aspect of the shoken relationship, that unavoidably, because this process is about change and about personal changed, that almost certainly there's going to be reciprocal pressing of buttons, mine and yours. I'm going to press yours and you're going to press mine. And we both make the agreement that we will allow that to happen, without it causing things to be 'cut asunder' as they might say in the Bible! And both of us are totally responsible, 100%, for the relationship. Both of us.

So that's what shoken is. And it's different to jukai. If you do shoken, there are certain general expectations from me, which is that you support the sangha, and occasionally do some sangha work as it's needed, for example when we made all the mats and cushions, or sometimes Andy may ask us to come in and clean the zendo or whatever. And I would expect you to practice hopefully one a week, and to see me in daisan at least once a month, and to do one sesshin a year, and to do maybe one StoneWater retreat a year. That would be my expectation of you if you did shoken with me. Now many of you, we've trained or worked together for many years, so it's kind of passed by that, but I'd still encourage you, if you want to, to do it. It's a nice ceremony, and it doesn't mean it's too late because you've been a practitioner for a long time.

OK, that's shoken - incidentally, in the Zen tradition in the West there's a move away from using these Japanese words, so you can think of it as a "personal commitment" to me, as opposed to shoken. Does anyone have any comments on that, or questions about that?

Q: So it's formalising what we do already?

It's formalising what you do already, yes. And I think the formalising is important.

Q: There's a much greater depth than I previously appreciated.

OK, this is why I'm wanting to say it, because it's not normally said. It's one of those things that you're supposed to absorb, the awareness of what these things mean, which is the way I learned! But I like it that you know what it's all about, I prefer it.

Q: So why don't we do this, generally?

Because you haven't asked! [Laughter] That's all it is! To be fair, I haven't asked you to ask, and I haven't clarified what it means, but traditionally there's always been a kind of obliqueness, and 'hazy moon'-ness to this whole practice. It's not a conscious obscurity, there's a sense of that you find out what you feel you need to know.

Q: Over the years, people have talked about shoken, and I've asked, "What is it?" and I've learned about it that way.

Right, you learned from asking about folk, yeah? It's a bit like when you're 12 and you ask about sex from your mates! [Laughter.] "What does all that mean?"

Q: Does it necessarily come first in the order of spoken then jukai?

It doesn't necessarily come first. As a person who's received shiho, I have a certain obligation to give jukai to people if they ask me. I don't always - didn't we have someone who wrote in via the website and insisted I gave them jukai? Alasdair wrote to them and said it might be nice if you at least came and met him! But no - so there are sometimes that I will say 'no', but jukai is different to shoken.

Q: So have we missed the opportunity [if we've already done jukai]?

No, not at all. They're two different things. You can do jukai, and traditionally - well, not traditionally but by practice, when they've done jukai, they've usually considered themselves as a student of the person from who they've received the precepts. But that's only by habit and practice, traditionally, jukai doesn't bind you or tie you to any other person. It's just that you've chosen to enter the Way. You've chosen, a bit like getting married, to say in public, "I am entering the Way." You're 'marrying' the dharma!

Q: Does that mean, regardless of whether we've taken tokudo or jukai or whatever, at any stage you could ask for that particular ceremony?

In normal circumstances, I wouldn't have done tokudo with somebody unless they'd asked me to do shoken, but my situation was slightly different because we've had an established sangha when I was only hoshi, a dharma holder, and not shiho. Incidentally, I don't know if you've noticed that shoken is the opposite of kensho, it's the other way around to kensho. Kensho is seeing into your own nature, and shoken is to see into one another's nature, there's a flip. So, in a way, what's happened with our sangha is an outcome of

the history of it, rather than conscious decisions that we've made, it's just fallen out that way.

Jukai

You know that tokudo means "leaving home and entering the way", the correct name for jukai is zaiki tokudo, "staying at home and entering the way". My sense of what happens at jukai is that, as someone was saying that I was talking to this evening, that this practice is a bit like when you're walking through fog or a mist, and slowly you start to get really wet. To begin with, you just feel a bit of dampness, but after a while you feel really wet. Regular practice seems to have that effect, and slowly but surely we start to think that maybe this is the way, that I've found a way, a path I can lead my life by, that maybe I even want to lead my life by it right the way through until I die. And slowly it starts to dawn on us that this is what we want, this is how I want to do it. And at that point, the jukai ceremony becomes a formal way of recognising this. Both you recognising and allowing other people to recognise that you've made a decision to commit yourself to this path. To the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha, the Three Treasures. And in a way, as a rite of passage, it marks the fact that you have - not necessarily embodied and understood at every level, but have embraced or accepted at a lesser level that you are the Buddha, that you've really got a handle on that. And that you want to practice the teachings of the Buddha. You want to manifest that in a formal way, you want to manifest formally that you are a member of the sangha, and that this practice is a guiderail for you, and part of that guiderail is taking the precepts, or receiving the precepts from me.

There are 16 precepts, and they're not rules that are laid down from the outside or imposed upon you. They offer a picture of how we might lead our lives which will bring harmony, perhaps, a sense of ease, or more of a sense of ease. All of these things are relative of course, you could still be not at ease, but more at ease than if you didn't take the precepts, or try to follow them! But the hope is that through the practice, manifesting the precepts will become a natural expression of who you are, rather than an external body out there imposing anything on you, that you'll suffer if you don't, that they will become a natural expression of how you live your life.

The other important thing about doing jukai is that you form a link. When you do jukai, you receive a dharma name, and you also receive a lineage chart. The lineage chart shows, with a red line, the Buddha, and a red line all the way down through his successors, and then finally down to me, and then a red line from me to you, to your new dharma name, and you become part of that lineage. It's a red line because it's kind of like a blood lineage. You have a connection all the way back to Shakyamuni Buddha. And I know that adds a kind of weight to how you feel about the whole thing. In this sangha, through Maezumi Roshi, and then through Genpo Roshi and then through Tenshin Roshi and then through me, we are all empowered to transmit the kai, the precepts, to you.

The mark of jukai, the external mark - because of course it's much more internal in the flavour, the way you decide to see the world, to be in the world - the rakasu is a mark of that. I like people to make their own. There are situations in which people don't or can't because of time, circumstance or other reasons, but essentially I like you to make your own rakasu. There's no fixed tradition, but in this lineage they're usually black, and the black is usually white. The rakasu is made up of 16 strips that represent fields, and the rakasu is a miniature version of the kesa. It arose because at one time in China, monks

were banned and couldn't wear the kesa publically, so these miniature rakusus were made which could be worn under your clothes.

And on the back is written your dharma name and the verse of the kesa, which Alasdair could read to use?

*Alasdair: Vast is the robe of liberation,
A formless field of benefaction.
I wear the Tathagata's teaching,
Saving all sentient beings.*

Very good. We had a wonderful two Thursday nights discussing what the verse of the Kesa means, it's worth looking into. So that's jukai, more a statement by you that you've chosen to enter the Way. Any questions on jukai? You're more familiar with jukai aren't you, than shoken?

One thing I'd like to say about jukai, and in a way I don't want to embarrass Alan... but I'm saying this to Alan! [Laughter.] He's been a practitioner longer than most of us put together in this practice. Alan won't mind me saying that he's an independent and very committed practitioner, but what I know is that people who have been in the practice for a long time, very often if something awful happens to them, they will request jukai, I've seen that pragmatically several times. So... don't wait till you get hit by a bus! [Laughter.]

Alan knows that I'm teasing him as well...

Alan: Oh, yes!

And I mean it!

Alan: [Unclear.]

He'll probably tell me to get stuffed in the morning!

Tokudo

So we've got shoken, jukai and then... tokudo.

Tokudo is quite simply ordaining as a priest. And when you ordain as a priest, it allows you to do various ceremonies that you wouldn't do otherwise in this tradition, and also - not necessarily but normally - if you're going to receive transmission you need to have been ordained. Now within the White Plum Asanga there are teachers that don't abide by that, but I would say that 95% of them - and I think there are about 95 teachers! Let me come back to that, because it's important me.

The vows that we do in tokudo aren't that different to what we do in jukai. It's called "leaving home to enter the Way," but my understanding of leaving home, and this is not how I used to think about it, I used to think about it literally, is that you are actually at home wherever you are. So wherever you are in the world, you're at home. That's what leaving home means, enter the Way, rather than staying at home.

The vows are the same, but there is a deeper commitment. When you do tokudo, there is an intrinsic commitment that this is your life, and more importantly, that not only are you

working towards your own clarity and development and growth as a human being, but you're also absolutely committed to work in that way for other folk.

In normal circumstances, and the reason we wear all these robes, if you'd been in a monastic setting, or you'd been a full-time monk, you would be seen to be wearing these robes, they would set you apart, and because you're set apart, you're being watched, there's more pressure to lead the monastic life and maintain your vows. Because it's changed in the west, and we don't wear them all the time, the person who does tokudo has much more of a responsibility to sustain an inner sense of their commitment and the change that it's made in their life. It's not going to be externally seen and checked anymore, so it requires more inner commitment, and inner integrity, to sustain.

And there's much more expectation from me of what I want from you. There's a real expectation that you will uphold the traditions of the practice and what it means to be ordained. I can tell you, just to give a brief flavour, the Japanese Soto school of America's guidelines for Soto Zen priests, seven principles of training:

1. Zazen,
2. Mindfulness,
3. Deepening understanding through personal effort,
4. Self-reflection,
5. Working with a teacher,
6. Studying Buddhist literature, and
7. (the most important for me) Sustained effort.

Let's just get back to that thing about transmission only coming through ordination: the whole thing about transmission is problematical for me, because somehow it's fallen out that we're not successful - and it's absolute nonsense - in this tradition unless that happens. It's absolute nonsense, it's crap. As a layperson who's been in the practice for a long time, there are many different ways in which you can teach, and even just by being who you are, you teach. Regardless of who's empowered you, or what rituals you've been through, if your commitment is powerful and strong and has that sustained effort and endurance that I'm talking about, then hopefully you will manifest who you are. And that is the best teaching. The absolute best teaching.

So did everybody hear that? It's important to me that you heard that. OK.

We won't bother with the whole business of hoshi and shiho this evening, but if anybody wanted to ask anything?

Q: You talk about tokudo as becoming a priest, rather than what people normally think of it, becoming a monk...

There's a lot of difficulty around what to call a Zen monk. Some people prefer to be called priests, some people prefer to be called monks. Incidentally, men and women are both "monks," there's no separation, no gender difference between men and women monks in this tradition, both are called monks, both are called priests. I suppose I would only call myself a priest if I was involved in lay ceremonies to do with births or weddings,

or those things which we understand a priest would normally do. Otherwise people get confused.

But there's also confusion about 'monk', because in the West people think of monks as (1) being celibate, and (2) living in a monastery. And neither of those are true within this tradition. They haven't been since the Meiji Restoration... 1868.

Before that, if you were a monk, you were supposed to be celibate. Of course none of them were which is why they changed it, they went with the flow, "Why bother?" you know! [Laughter.]

Q: Some of us think the same thing about priests...

It's true, but they haven't gone with the flow yet, they're still holding out!

Q: Because I [unclear] a vicar...

A vicar, yeah. Because you're C of E, aren't you?

Q: Was!

Was - well, you can be both! I like the C of E, it's a broad church!

Q: Is there any formal token of shoken? I've seen at various times on retreat people with...

Yes, we used to have these badges, has anyone got one? There's one on my rakasu, from Kanzeon [Sangha].

Q: Is that because Genpo...

He gave it to people when they did jukai, not shoken, that's correct. They became incredibly expensive, so I just stopped ordering them! So, no, there's no outer symbol.

Q: Can I ask the significance of the cloth that you bow on?

The zagu? I don't know what the significance of the zagu is! One of the important things when you wear monk's robes, you'll see when I sit down you see me hold the kesa up, you're not supposed to sit or kneel on the kesa, so one reason for the zagu is to keep everything clean and off the floor and off the mat. But I'm sure there's other significances, because you form a cross when you lay it out...

Q: ...and it's folded like that...

It has to be folded like that or you'd be hours standing there trying to get the damned thing in place! So the Japanese cleverly, like origami, when you receive it, it's already folded and now and then all you have to do is give it a press. And if it needs dry cleaning, you need to get somebody else's zagu so that you can re-fold it! It's a good question.

Q: for everybody who's wearing robes, particularly these [indicating kolomo and kesa], it's a deliberate encumbrance, isn't it?

Yes, this whole thing is designed specifically to make sure that you stay absolutely present. Because if you forget for a moment what you're doing or where you are, you're just all over the place. These things will trip you up! You try and do jobs with sleeveage like that!

Even when you sit down, you've got to get it all tucked up and everything in place. So it's consciously designed to keep you aware.

Q: Roshi says the robes train you.

Oh, they train you for sure, they do. For some of us it's more of a struggle than others - for me it was a serious - it still is! - struggle. Other people are immediately graceful and can handle them. Don't say anything!

Thank you.