



A HARVEST OF JUKAI

We sat together at Harvest Sesshin, 41 of us humans and uncountable creatures, trees, rocks, all sentient and insentient beings on Dai Bosatsu mountain, in the light of the full moon, delving into the unthinkable.

The bountiful harvest of our sitting was Jukai, a ceremony in which six students committed to a life informed by the Buddhist Precepts.

What does this commitment mean? It is not simply a matter of checking a list of guidelines, however helpful they may be. Rather, it requires keen attention and insight into Soyen Shaku's words: "Your body is the body of all sentient beings; your mind is but a constituent of the mind of all beings."

If we attempt to follow the precepts from a self-centered vantage point—if we see everything from within the small bubble we call the self, through the clouded lens of an ego-entity—we are stuck in *dukkha*: dissatisfaction and dis-ease, the First Noble Truth. Nothing seems quite the way it should be; people aren't doing our bidding. Believing that we are at the center of the universe, despite evidence to the contrary, leads to loneliness, frustration, resentment, and confusion. We have to listen to our inner language to realize how seriously enslaving this usual way of living is: "I need, I have to have, I am a person who, I want, I, I, I."

Trying to control the universe according to our preferences and habits of mind, desperately wanting to hold onto what is ever-shifting and fundamentally empty, we end up darting from one distraction to another, one angry interaction after another, one addictive pattern after another. Always running toward what we feel we lack, always running away from anything that threatens our separated individuality, we can never feel inner contentment. But as the Second Noble Truth reminds us, we must examine these deluded patterns, see their origins, and cut the root of craving and aversion.

How do we do this? The Third Noble Truth is cessation. Stop. Sit down and shut up. Exhale completely. Be breathed by the breath of the universe; let MU do you; awaken to the One Mind that abides nowhere. Sitting after sitting, entering into deep samadhi, we become aware that nothing is lacking, nothing is superfluous. What comes from this experience is trust in this One Mind, trust in who we truly are. And then we go out into our daily lives and, as Rinzai put it, we are the master of circumstances. When action is called for, we act. When non-action is called for, we remember what Isan said to Kyozan in Case 27 of *The Iron Flute*: "Everything is the owner of its karma; why should I interfere?" Or, as is said in AA, "Let go and let God."

(see next page)

Because of our commitment to zazen, because of the profundity of sesshin mind, we can follow this path no matter how many twists and turns it seems to take, walking straight on the zigzag road. The Fourth Noble Truth lays it out: the Eight-fold Path of right understanding, intention, speech, conduct, occupation, effort, attention, and meditation. This “right” is not some dualistic concept; it is directly seeing things as they are, and reflects what the Buddha says in the *Dhammapada*: “Everything depends on the mind. One’s life is shaped by one’s mind; we become what we think.”

So these Four Noble Truths, together with the Six Paramitas, are the underpinnings of the commitment of Jukai. *Paramita* means Perfection, and refers to crossing over the sea of samsara to the Other Shore of awakened mind. *Ga-te, Ga-te, Paraga-te, Parasam Ga-te, Bodhi, Svaha*. To live by the paramitas is to transform the Three Poisons: greed, anger, and folly—into the Three Virtues: generosity, love, and wisdom.

The first paramita is *dana*: giving. This is the foundation of our practice. The true meaning of *Tisarana* is, “I give my life to the Buddha, to the Dharma, to the Sangha.” Instead of grabbing, the equivalent of holding your breath, let go happily, exhaling with a heart of offering. But *dana* is not a product of an ego-entity, a separated individuality. It is not an intrusive, arrogant interaction. It is, as Isan said, understanding that each one of us is the owner of our karma. As the *Diamond Sutra* tells us, “A Bodhisattva who practices charity with mind attached to notions of form is like someone groping sightless in the dark. But a Bodhisattva who practices charity with mind detached from form is like someone with open eyes in the radiant glory of the morning.” So your generosity must come from non-interference, non-attachment, and discernment.

If you understand giving, then the second paramita, *sila*, keeping the precepts, will feel as natural as the snow flakes darting in the wind, the lake glittering through the bare trees. Coming from the wide-open heart/mind of zazen, your thoughts, words, and actions will uphold the Three Immeasurables: infinite gratitude for all that is past; infinite service toward all that is present, and infinite responsibility toward all that is in the future.

And then to encourage yourself, remember the third paramita: *kshanti*. Be patient and cheerful no matter what your karma brings. Sometimes you may simply have to endure what you are sure cannot be borne. Each one of us will die, and each one of us is likely to experience great physical pain before this body falls away. No matter how much difficulty circumstances may bring, remember what the *Diamond Sutra* says: “If virtuous men and women who receive this teaching are downtrodden, their unfortunate destiny is the inevitable result of karma committed in their past mortal lives. By virtue of their present misfortunes, the effects of their past will be worked out, and then they will be in a position to realize Supreme Enlightenment.”

The fourth paramita, *virya*: Be diligent: practice with assiduity. How many more breaths do you have? Don’t take a single one for granted; don’t waste this precious life. Remember, we are all living in a burning building, as the *Lotus Sutra* says. Sit with intensity and live with compassionate tenacity. When you stumble—and you will—immediately chant the “Verse of Purification.” No deceit, no self-justification, just true and open confession. And then: prostrations. You can start with nine!

(see next page)

The fifth paramita, *dhyana*: Zazen! Zazen is the purification of all our ancient twisted karma. In “The Song of Zazen,” Hakuin says, “Even those who have practiced it for just one sitting will see all their evil karma erased.” So embrace whatever comes, sit with it with a broad and radically accepting mind, a warm heart. Enter into samadhi. Let yourself be drenched through and through. Trust in the stillness at the center of being. You will discover the natural ease of being at home in your own being. Have confidence in who you truly are.

The sixth paramita, *prajna*: probe deeply, investigate further; wake up! Cutting through preferences, know the joy of living with no complaints, with gratitude for everything, just as it is. Take a step off the 100-foot pole, and actualize this awakened mind throughout the ten directions. *Atta dipa*: You are the light itself; *atta sarana*, you are the refuge; *dhamma dipa*, light of dharma; *dhamma sarana*, refuge of dharma. Let your light shine.

Here’s an additional paramita, called “The Paramita of Foolishness,” from an essay by Soyen Shaku:

“A student asked me: ‘If I study Zen, will I improve my wisdom, strengthen my memory, increase my courage, and have clarity about my actions due to my precise use of will?’

”I told him, ‘Maybe so, maybe not! Zen has no aim from the beginning. If you could make yourself a big fool, and become great awkwardness, and be like a child playing a game wherever you go, then you would begin to know something about Zen. Whatever you have thought you have learned, throw it out! In whatever way you think you are wise, throw it out! In whatever way you think you are skillful, try to forget it. Then come to me, folding your hands in gassho, and ask me to teach you Zen.’

“That person left, making a very unpleasant face. I am such as stupid person. This is my way of crossing this sea of delusion to the Other Shore—which in Sanskrit is called *paramita*.”

The ceremony of receiving the precepts is not the culmination of months and years of practice, but is just the beginning: “However endless the Buddha’s Way is, I vow to follow it.”

The six students and their new names are:

Paul Aviles	Taishō	Essential Nature
Amber Davis	Jikō	Compassion Shining
Amy Russell	Myōsei	Wondrous Sincerity
Mark Barber	Muken	Without Ceasing
Sander Hicks	ShōAn	Hands of Peace
David Pless	Hōzan	Dharma Mountain

Dharma Mountain