

Kosho: Speaking to us this morning is Susan O'Connell, —a longtime friend of mine, who is now—I'll think I'll just say. When we first met it was about 20 years ago and we were complaining about Zen Center and about how we'd fix it. I knew that it was impossible, and Susan said, "Well someday we'll be in charge." Well, now she is the president of the SFZC. Thank you, it's nice to have you here.

Do you do the chant?

Let's.

Good morning.

How many of you have not been around for a Jukai ceremony before?

About a third.

So, today is a celebration and it's supported by ritual. And so I thought I would just talk about some of the parts of the ceremony that you're going to be engaged with, and if there's time maybe there will be some time at the end for questions. We'll see what happens.

My teacher, Reb Anderson, wrote a book called Being Upright. It's his offering around his study of the precepts over many years. I have a lot of a little tabs in here. I'm going to refer to this as I remind myself of the value of this ceremony.

Before I even read this I just want to say that when Zen practice came to the West and was picked up by westerners who met various teachers, Japanese, Korean, etc...westerners were really drawn to Zazen. Really drawn to seated meditation. And that's pretty much all that happened for a while between the people who brought the practice to the west and the people in the west that tasted it for the first time -- usually from someone like Alan Watts or someone, and then when they met the teachers, the teachers said come sit with me as a way to relate. And so people sat, and they sat and they sat and they developed strong sitting practice, as I'm sure many of you have developed. I so respect and appreciate people who are able in their lay lives who are able to make the commitment to this practice. It was really hard for me before I moved to Zen center to maintain a daily practice -- it's much easier in a dedicated communal setting. So I appreciate your commitment to being here and being upright.

You'll notice that zazen instructions have a lot to do with being upright. Letting the body find balance. It was discovered after a lot of people sat for quite a while, after people sat for a long time, that sitting is not enough. That we actually have to be upright in our daily lives, and upright in terms of being aligned with our own values. Our own values.

Those two practices, those two studies, affect each other. Think about your sitting meditation and you've just lied to your daughter. A little lie. Kind of a white lie, you wouldn't tell a huge lie to your daughter but maybe you didn't tell her the whole truth -- for her benefit, of course. And you're sitting there, and I propose that that lack of being aligned with your own value will affect your sitting practice. It will ripple through your body and mind, your energy, and it will be harder to sit straight. Harder to sit upright. If we're not aligned with our own values, we cannot actually do zazen, and vice versa. We don't know what it is to be patient with ourselves, to be totally accepting of ourselves, and we are probably going to have a hard time with the precepts.

It took a while, and that was a while before it was really seen in the practice. But those of you who have received the precepts in the past, or are doing so today, or those of you who might be thinking -- hmm, interesting. Maybe. Maybe me too. You are understanding that there is an integration of how we behave -- the karmic consequences of how we behave -- and the commitment to sit upright amidst our suffering to help people.

It says at the very start of this book about the ceremony, the precepts offer a gate to Zen practice. Stillness into active expression into everyday affairs, a way for compassion to enter all aspects of our life.

This ceremony today has -- you could look at it in terms of two basic aspects; one aspect is preparation, and the other is receiving. And most of it is preparation. So you've been preparing, those of you; -- those of you who are not going to be receiving the precepts today, this ceremony is also for you. As a reminder if you've taken the precepts, it's for you as a friend of the person who is receiving the precepts, it is for your eyes and ears to see and hear, for your heart to check in with itself. What do these sound like to me right now? What's my relationship to these precepts right now? So the ceremony is for you -- and so this talk is maybe a little bit about preparation -- if you have not been sewing or studying actively for the ceremony, this is your preparation, perhaps.

So in the very start of the ceremony, the teacher invokes the presence and compassion of our ancestors. In faith that we are Buddha, we enter Buddha's way. That's one of the phrases. This is very Zen to me because it reminds us that there is nowhere to go. And yet we still enter. There's nothing to do -- we already are Buddha, and the precepts remind us of that as we try to do things.

So invoking the ancestors is a practice of asking for help. It's a very important practice, and many of us are not so good at that. I am reminded that that's because I think I can do things by myself. That little kid -- I can do

it myself! It's a very alive part of me, a very well-trained part of me. How about you? Do you have a being like that that expresses him or herself in that way? No you can't! It's never been by yourself, whether it's your friends who are physically present now or even being helped by the inspiration of the practice of all Buddhas and ancestors -- everyone who sat JUST LIKE you are sitting today. No different. Just human beings, sitting. Bothered by their own minds, aching knees, maybe the content wasn't the same. They weren't worried about their iPhone being turned off or not. They had other thoughts, just as distracting.

So we start the ceremony by reminding ourselves that we cannot do it by ourselves. Appreciating the practice of many, many, untold number of beings who have done exactly what you are doing today.

And I may say this later too, but this is a phrase that comes quite early in the book, and I underlined it, it says the precepts have no fixed meaning in a changing world, how do we maintain these precepts after we receive them? They call to us each moment. Those of you who have different religious backgrounds may have received ethical instruction of various kinds -- I was brought up Catholic and I was confirmed and I was taught the commandments. Which, given my nature, looked like great things to break...with unspeakable consequences! Something really bad is going to happen if you violate these things. There's comfort in that kind of clarity sometimes. But guess what folks -- you're not in that situation right now. You're not going to be given something so solid that you can hang onto it. You're going to be led to taste -- one taste of uprightness. And have to work that out moment by moment what that actually is. These are guidelines. They are not rules or commandments, they are suggestions that you need to check your own resonance with -- you need to explore the parameters of your understanding of what it means to not slander.

Sorry.

But these are all grey -- not black and white just like the sky today. This is what you're taking up -- active, active relationship to not knowing the answer in any given moment but being guided by a deep sense which this ceremony helps to further implant in your body and mind. It's a feeling -- this doesn't feel right; why? Where does that come from? The causes and conditions of our life -- our training. But also something else; something that during zazen we become more and more familiar with. Just being ourselves.

And then we pay homage and thank, and show gratitude to all the ancestors, those who have also made this effort. I invite you during that part along with homage to the Buddhas in the 10 directions, to Shakyamuni, to also pull up into the room and remind yourself of your other teachers. The others that have inspired you -- take a moment right now and pull into your mind a being for whom you have

great gratitude. Grace was telling me the other day about a high school teacher that offered meditation -- it just clicked for her. The striking of that in her is still resonating. So remember to acknowledge and appreciate the beings in your life that are the causes and conditions of you being able to hear the dharma -- hear it, receive it, and begin to practice with it.

Renunciation is a part of the ceremony. Renunciation can seem like doing without. When we think about that word, we think about people renouncing worldly affairs, I don't see anyone in this room that can actually do that. I don't do it, I live in a Buddhist community and I am very involved in worldly affairs. So what is the relationship with worldly affairs that is being called for in this ceremony? In this book, Reb suggests that what we are renouncing are our delusions. Our delusions of separateness. That is an amazingly hopeful thing. Can you imagine really letting go of that delusion? My experiences with -- well, here's a story.

I moved into the SFZC when I had just closed down my business and the man I was dating started seeing someone else, and my son had just moved out, and it was a terrible time. I'm going to give everything away, move into the Zen Center and see what happens in a couple of months. I brought two little black dresses and a sweater and maybe two pair of shoes, and I still had a storage locker. In there I had a box with all my colorful clothes -- I did keep some stuff, after all! I had been there for about 4-5 weeks and I got an itch -- not sure if this is cross-gender or not -- but I really wanted to get that particular pair of shoes in the box in the storage. They were still black, but they had a heel on them that went better with the skirt! So I had this itch for that particular pair. And I went to the closet and I came back with 15 pairs of shoes. And there they were, 2 little dresses and 15 options for the bottom part, because I had been premature in letting go of that. I had put it away in some kind of dramatic, drastic idea of what renunciation means, and I now understand renunciation as something which falls away -- if you have to push it out, it boomerangs! You can play it up a little bit, you know, like Lent -- let's give up candy for Easter. You see what that's like, and then on Easter you give up lots of candy anyway because that's what people do. So renunciation to begin with is a relationship, it's a study -- it's like, "what's needed?" And on that very basic level, renouncing delusion -- how much is our delusion about separateness needed? That's your study. That's the study that ends up uncovering enlightenment which is already there.

We study that separateness, that protective shield, the mindness of self and the non-mindness of other. We study that repeatedly.

So be patient with renunciation, patient with it! And today I would say in terms of that self and other divide, and the delusion and the ability to renounce it, just imagine that today, in this room, you are safe. You are safe. You are really, really safe.

Another part of the ceremony is a confession; with my Catholic background, that was something that was a very wonderful ceremony -- being able to confess your sins and be forgiven is kinda neat. We don't do the direct forgiving thing in this practice, you have to do that yourself in this practice, but the confession was important. All my ancient, twisted karma. Letting go helps -- but in order to truly confess we need to experience the wrongness, the offness, the lack of alignment, of what that action actually was. Not mitigate it -- I was tired. She provoked me. But actually feel that you made a mistake. The arrogance of us to think that we're not ever going to make a mistake. It's impossible to be a human being without making mistakes. We're *going* to do it -- so turning towards that mistake takes qualities that get developed in Zazen and in your precept practice. It takes practice, patience, willingness to turn towards the pain. Not look for all the ways to look around it. Towards and through.

And that practice requires a generous heart. We need to first feel it and it is really hard to taste the mistake -- it tastes very bad: it takes badly to me. To ME. We have different mistakes, each of us, because we are developing our relationship to our ethics and our values. So I cannot -- I ought not -- judge you and your mistakes. This happens in community all the time, people complaining about others' practice. Take care of your own practice! Is usually how we respond.

That practice of compassion requires openness and generosity -- and I wrote last night: irony. Come on folks, you're going to make mistakes -- it's a tad ironic to think that you're not. I'm not saying it's funny, but it's humbling.

So then -- we're still in the preparation phase of the ceremony -- I didn't mention before but that sewing of the rakusu stitch by stitch -- someone did a study of different lineages of Zen that have come from the East to the West and which ones have proliferated more or had more of a robust response to the offering, and so forth. One thing that is similar in the lineages which are the most robust is that they all sew their own robes; there is something about the intimacy of the act that settles us and is a helpful part of receiving the precepts. So we take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha. With each stitch. And rather than go into each of those three areas, which could take a whole lecture, I will just say: what is here, what is returning to, and what is flying back? Even in the stitch you come back, you pull back, there is an energy in it. Returning -- basically, being where you are: but really being where you are.

Being with Buddha. With Dharma in your body and mind. With Sangha.

So then the receiving begins: there is receiving of the pure precepts. And, again, we could talk about all of these in quite a lot of detail, but just as a reminder: well, avoiding all evil, doing all good, freeing, saving, helping,

being-with all beings. When I first heard about the precepts and starting my own study, I could understand not doing any harm. I'm okay with that, I can make that vow and really work on not being harmful. I think I can do that. But doing all good? Me? Please. The flawed, selfish, greedy person that I am. Can I enter into the realm of doing all good? That seemed beyond me, but I took the precepts anyway. Where are you is the right place for you to be -- just for me to know that I had a difficulty imagining doing all good is following the precepts. Knowing that I have a difficult relationship with that one and it doesn't quite fit the shape of my mind, currently, which is still deeply influenced by all the causes and conditions of my life. The doing part -- was bugging me. Because if I think I'm doing it, I know it's not all going to be good. So but I think for me, and me in many ways, that non-doingness of zazen is what is such good medicine for me. When I taught meditation instruction, zazen is radical not-doing. And every year I discover more and more subtle ways in which I still think I can do things. So for me the difficulty with the second pure precept. What is your difficulty? Is there a difficulty in receiving these? If there is, it's just fine. Take them into your body and mind, and then together, you and the precepts turn each other -- back and forth, up and down.

The other thing I wanted to talk about is vow itself. And this is related to the practicing all good, which I underlined. I haven't used the word bodhisattva yet, but these are bodhisattva vows, which are taken for the benefit of all beings. They are not about self improvement, self-realization; they are taken to be a tool for the whole sentient and insentient world to wake up. To be a vehicle to wake up. You're included in that, by the way, but it's not just for you -- which actually makes everything possible. It's possible if it's not just for me. Reb says that refraining from evil and practicing all good is not about purifying or improving yourself. So that's good for thinking about the precepts, but for vow: we say that nothing has substantial self. Not me, not this table. No things, no beings have substantiality. Everything changes, there's nothing that is permanent. However, the ancient monks who did extremely detailed studies of the body and mind, and made lists and lists of factors of mind and different qualities of feeling, talked about one thing that has subtle materiality. The word in Pali (transcriber note: 'avneeshnaptirupa', vaguely) means a kind of a subtle materiality. That thing is a vow. A vow that is taken in front of other people or in front of the Buddha. And I do sometimes feel like a vow gives me something to stand on -- it has something that helps; I don't know what that substance is, and I'm not saying it's quite certain, but there is a sense that one can stand on one's vow, and it supports us in perhaps ways that we cannot fully understand.

I knew this would happen -- so we got all the way to the things that people think are actually the precepts, which are the 10 grave precepts: these are grave -- quite a word! One of the things I noticed last night was I was looking at how -- well I know a lot of them are about speech, and we could use a lot of

help with our speech. Three of the precepts are about speech: a disciple of Buddha does not lie, a disciple of Buddha does not speak of the faults of others (slander), and a disciple of Buddha does not praise self at the expense of other. All speech related. Then, I tried to categorize the others, and in my categorization, four of them are about desire: leaning into the wanting realm. So, a disciple does not take what is not given, a disciple of Buddha is not possessive of anything, a disciple of Buddha does not misuse sexuality, and does not intoxicate mind or body of self or other (sensual realm). And then, two of them, are about violence, about hate. A disciple of Buddha does not kill; and a disciple does not harbor ill will (hatred realm).

So these are maybe -- well maybe the speech realm is a delusion realm, greed and hate as well are present, so all the poisons are dealt with. And then the final one is does not disparage the triple treasure, which gets us back to the beginning of Buddha, Dharma, Sangha: Buddha, the being from which this tremendous lineage of awakening has sprung, the encouragement that he was a human being just like us, the Dharma which are the teachings that touch the root of suffering, and help us do our job of helping everyone, and then the Sangha, which is right here, right now, all of you. All of those who you know and love, all of your teachers, all of your enemies. All of us. And today, me. So best to you and thank you very much.