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To The Board of Directors,
The Zen Studies Society
July 29, 2010

As we all witness the imploding of the institutional structure which vested inordinate power on an Abbot, and you are now swamped with suggestions on how to go forward, I hope you have the time to read what a Dharma heir and former vice-abbot has to say.

What is ahead of you is very difficult, since you do not have a legacy of excellent stewardship from previous directors. There are no stories from the past (directors) that will inspire you. Some really did nothing for the organization. Many, as you know, left in bitterness. All the past directors I have talked to have misgivings about their tenure in the ZSS as directors. Most have profound regrets for letting things go by they could have objected to. Please do not suffer the same fate.

A time came when it was impossible (for me) "to serve at the pleasure of Roshi" and at the same time meet the imperatives for a healthy and sustainable organization. You are at the same juncture. Since its beginnings Roshi was super-imposed upon the organization (ZSS). There was no daylight between them. Please, though you were handpicked by the Roshi to serve at his pleasure, do not now be panderers telling him what he wants to hear.

Roshi and Aiho-San are to be applauded for stepping down from the board. It was what was best for all concerned. Now that you are freed from their inhibiting presence, you too can do the best for all concerned. Remember the Carlsons, who are your hosts as you meet in Shobo-Ji or Dai Bosatsu, and who gave Roshi a dwelling. Remember Bill Johnstone. Please remember their decency and great hopes in your deliberations. Given the current state of affairs in the ZSS, what would they want to see you do?

I understand what it means to be loyal to a teacher, as much as any of you. I know for sure that the teaching legacy of the Roshi can be salvaged only if the board proceeds honestly and transparently. Towards this end, I offer you my help and resources. If you haven't done it yet, I suggest that the official legal counsel for the ZSS be separated from the legal counsel for Roshi. If legal counsel (he/she) for the ZSS is the same person as legal counsel to Roshi, you will have no credibility with the curious and interested Sangha ready to judge what you do as you proceed, and you may run into legal difficulties as well.

Any reassessment of the Roshi in the years to come will depend on how unflinching and honest the board is today. A response from the board that tries to obfuscate some things that are simple will be imputed to Roshi's influence and will further damage his legacy. I suspect that the internet will encourage more people to come out with their grievances. There will be more revelations to cope with. Ongoing ZSS responses should be plain and honest so that people will look compassionately on the past of the ZSS. Please, always be aware of your fiduciary responsibilities, and if you only have a vague awareness of what they are, perhaps this is a good time to consider whether you should continue being on the board.

Sincerely,

Andy Afable