

August 16, 2010

Dear Kobutsu,

Thank you for your note. Your response to my thoughts on the latest story about Shimano Eido Roshi of Daibosatsu Monastery in New York compels me to write a long letter to you on why that situation is important to me personally. In short, it is because of the complicated net of connections between him, me and my students, in particular Genjo Marinello (<http://home.comcast.net/~zenquaker>), who, as you may know, is Shimano's successor.

I think we should be careful about spreading the word about Shimano to the Japanese press. They may pick it up anyway, in which case some of the saner voices among the Zen communities outside of Japan (like yours) should definitely exert every muscle to get the record straight. But we must remember that many people can get hurt, not to mention the damage that can be caused to Buddhist teachings and practices here.

I remember when Joe (as he was known then) appeared at a meditation retreat (*sesshin*) on Vashon Island in Puget Sound. After becoming a University of Washington professor (of Japanese cultural and religious history) in 1966, I established and led the Seattle Zen Center. I was ordained as a Rinzai priest in the Cold Mountain lineage in 1970 by my teacher Miyauchi Kanko when we did a pilgrimage together in India. (You know about my background from my blog and Facebook page, so I simply will focus here on how Shimano's misdeeds can impact many people, including me.)

Joe Marinello's first sesshin was probably around 1975. Although a number of UW professors and students had been SZC regulars, even going with me to Kyoto for "real" sesshins, Joe was new to the game. I remember that I had arranged for one of my Zen priest friends (Hirano Katsufumi, a Soto priest whom I had trained with at the Obaku temple of Mampuku-ji) to come to Seattle to join the sesshin with me. Joe and most everybody fell in love with "Hirano Osho" as I suggested they call him. Having a priest with a Japanese face in the group for the first time seems to have been comforting to all participants.

I must tell you that Hirano displayed some of the unrestrained behavior

that Shimano and other “fish out of Japanese waters” do. He was flattered by the attention female students gave him. And I had to insist that he stop touching them inappropriately, reminding him that he was married (like Japanese priests of all denominations.) He spoke no English, so I had to translate everything for him. Looking back, I probably made Hirano sound too cute and teddy-bearish.

Joe was full of questions, which Hirano and I both tried to answer, but we kept our answers short so Joe could concentrate on sitting. Joe became one of my most serious Zen students. Hirano made two other visits to the Seattle Zen Center. On his last visit he was not the only Japanese priest present. Genki Takabayashi came, too.

I had run across Genki-san in Daishu-in (the main training sub-temple of Ryoan-ji.) I spent three summers training there under the late Morinaga Roshi, who explained to me that Genki was a Rinzaï man (Ryoan-ji is in the Myoshin-ji lineage.) When I wondered how that could happen (because as a foreigner I had the freedom to train anywhere I wished, but no Japanese had that freedom) he told me a sad story.

It seems that Genki was an orphan who was raised to be a priest at Ryutaku-ji. (Actually, Hirano had the same experience after his parents were killed in a car accident, but that is another story.) Genki had no pressure as a first son of a priest to become a priest, and probably grew up somewhat resentful at his fate. Apparently, when he was around 18 his teacher (his adopted father, Gempo Roshi) sent him to the grand priest-training-hall (*sodo*) of Daitoku-ji.

As Morinaga put it to me, on those occasions when he could go out on the town, Genki was a womanizer and pub-crawler. He got one woman from the neighborhood pregnant, she refused to abort the child, and Genki refused to marry her, thereby bringing shame to her family and to the temple. So he was kicked out of Daitoku-ji. As a favor to a friend, Morinaga Roshi took him in. But he made Genki’s life hell: when I met him at Daishu-in he was low man on the totem pole, relegated to menial tasks and never allowed to engage in anything important.

I felt terribly sorry for him. I also felt it was tragic that he would have to live the rest of his life in Japan as an outcaste priest or unskilled laborer

with no opportunity to be happy. He showed no remorse for his sexual misconduct, but he seemed determined to go as far in his training as he could. He was a kind of Zen fundamentalist, regarding his sitting and his adherence to the tiniest detail of Rinzai Daitoku-ji liturgy, which made him not very popular with the Rinzai Myoshin-ji clergy who were helping him.

I remember returning to Seattle after that experience at Daishu-in and thinking that I had to bring Genki to America and provide him with a green card. I wrote to Morinaga about my plan and not surprisingly he told me that under no circumstances would he recommend that Genki leave Japan. He told me that he would not even approve of my sending Genki an invitation to come for a brief visit. After agonizing over my duty to Morinaga and my sense of justice as an American, I sent Genki an invitation, with the proviso that he could return to Japan anytime if things did not work out.

They worked out, but not quite the way I expected. Genki came to Seattle in 1979 with the same hang-dog look he had at Daishu-in, and he deferred to me in everything. He was a very good sitter. He looked like he was made of stone. And he was the first to clear away the table after meals, even when it was not his turn. When people started to call him "Roshi" he complained to me that they shouldn't do that.

The scriptures we used were traditionally Rinzai except that we also recited the list of names in the Soto lineage as well as the Rinzai. He sat quietly during the Soto recitation, but did not complain. In my teishos and dokusan (koan) sessions I referred sometimes to Christian and Jewish parallels to parables in the Blue Cliff Record and Rinzai-roku. But he didn't understand what I was saying, so he didn't complain.

Gradually Genki-san began to relate to SZC members personally, with sign language as well as broken English. I encouraged him to improve his English skills. Sometime around 1980 I remember hearing people refer to him as Roshi. I spoke to him about it, and he again said that was not appropriate. We talked about the term. And I said it was alright with me if it was alright with him, because many people seemed to want to have a Roshi, and I had explained to people that at that point my

Roshi was still alive and I did not feel they should call me by that title (see my essay “On Roshi” in FB and my blog.)

This was a bad decision. Genki immediately changed. He assumed the title and the role with gusto. In 1980 he announced that Joe should be ordained and be given the priest name of Genjo. We held the ceremony at the clubhouse in the community where my family lived in Redmond. Soon after he insisted that we needed to have a Zendo (a group house) that he would be in charge of. We began to look for a big rental house.

UW weekly sittings would end and be replaced by daily morning sittings and short sesshins in the Zen house. Week-long sesshins were to be held in campsites with suitable accommodations for sleeping and eating. The board of directors of the SZC (with me as president) was to make no decisions that were not first reviewed by Genki-san. In order to give spiritual weight to the Seattle Zen Center, Genki decided we should have a temple name, one that combined part of his name and part of mine. His priest name is Gentoku (Original Virtue); mine is Kangan (Cold Rock). So our temple became Tokugan-ji: Temple of the Virtuous Rock.

A big house on Seattle’s Capital Hill was found after a few months. About six rooms were rented by SZC members. Genki had one, too. I believe it was in 1981 that two very important people paid us a visit there: His Holiness the Dalai Lama (whose visit to Seattle and the University I was in charge of) and Aitken Roshi. I don’t remember who came first. With His Holiness the security was very heavy, and the whole thing lasted only about an hour. We recited the Heart Sutra in Sanskrit alliteration (Tibetan and Japanese, respectively), enjoyed a brief question and answer period, with me acting as interpreter for Genki-san. (His Holiness spoke in his usual charming English.)

The second important visitor was Aitken Roshi. He came because he had heard of Genki’s connection to Ryutaku-ji, I think. But Genki seemed uncomfortable and pretty much allowed Aitken Roshi and I to have the evening to ourselves. I thought Genki was unusually rude to ignore our guest, but I enjoyed Roshi immensely. I remember he wanted to know who had prepared the English translation of the Four great Vows for our sutra book. (We recited in both the phonetically Japanese Sanskrit and in English.)

When I said I had made the English version many years ago, with advice from both Suzuki Daisetsu and Hisamitsu Shin'ichi, he smiled and said something like, "Well you know those guys were not even Zen." I said I knew that both came from Jodo Shin families, but that I thought they were great teachers, somewhat on the same level as Roshi's inspiration, R. H. Blyth. He smiled in agreement (reminding me that he was a long-time friend of Suzuki's) and we went over my translation word by word.

My translation reads: "Sentient beings are everywhere; I vow to open myself to them. The physical illusion is so real; I vow to see it for what it is. Aspects of Being are infinite; I vow to know them all. The Buddha's teaching is complete; I vow to perfect myself in it." Roshi asked me if I thought my version was better than the standard one about saving beings and overcoming suffering. I struggled to explain, with youthful scholarly hedging, why I thought so, when he said he thought so too. But he said he wondered if most people would understand it. That was my last and only face-to-face encounter with Aitken Roshi.

Things happened pretty fast in the Zen House after that. I did not live there because I had a wife and two sons, and a busy teaching schedule. On one of my summers in Kyoto I shared my concern about Genki-san with Morinaga Roshi. He immediately urged me to set some rules and put them in a letter (in Japanese and English) to Genki and the Seattle Sangha. I did not hear from Genki, and when I returned he refused to discuss it. He clearly had not shown my letter to people in the SZC.

Genki had begun to run a tight ship. At sesshins he insisted that we both do the individual interviews during *dokusan*, but in Japanese, with me doing the translations both ways: from English to Japanese for him and from Japanese to English for the students. I found it cumbersome and exhausting.

However, I also became aware that open sexual couplings and marijuana use were part of the scene. Later, one of the couplings turned out to be Genki himself and a European female student. When she became pregnant she ultimately decided with his encouragement to have an abortion. I assumed that we would hold a traditional *mizuko* ceremony but he refused. So I conducted a private one for the woman.

Most people in the house did not know about the pregnancy or abortion, and those who did never mentioned it.

At some point Genki-san said he wanted to live separately in a house of his own. We found one, rented it, and gradually the entire training operation shifted to Genki's house. The Zen House was still in the budget, and things were tight. But when some land near Mt. Rainier became available, Genki suggested we buy it and build a true Zendo there for our sesshins. One member was an architect and he drew up some plans, first for the mountain retreat and another for an in-city site. The retreat was built entirely by Sangha members. Countless hours of labor were put into the construction of the Zendo.

I think we held three sesshins there before Genki dropped a bombshell: he announced at a board meeting that he would no longer be part of SZC or Tokugan-ji. People who wanted to stay with me were welcome to do so, but those who wanted to train in the true Rinzai tradition should follow him. This caused a painful break, leaving my side holding the bag. I conducted about five sesshins in the mountain Zendo, before we had to sell it (to a Tibetan-style group); we found a house near the UW to rent for some of the students who stayed with me to live and practice.

We stripped the house down and converted it into a pleasant, clean, efficient group house and very strict Zendo. I kept the name Tokugan-ji, sub-titled Seattle Zen Center, and a prime rule in the place was no sex or drugs. This arrangement worked well, students had ample time and space to live and eat together in a temple atmosphere, sharing chores and duties in the Zendo. I offered *dokusan* twice a week after evening sits. In the 1990's we saw little of our former colleagues and Genki-san, but we heard they were doing well, and marveled at how successful Genki became with his hobby of making pottery.

The 1990's were thus a time when two Japanese-style Zen groups were in Seattle: mine and Genki's (which he named Dai Bai Zan Cho Bo Zen Ji, or "The Great Plum Mountain – Listening to the Dharma Zen Temple" 大梅山聽法禪時.) Back in 1981 Genki announced that he had arranged for Joe to go to Japan for two years of training, at Ryutaku-ji. That must have been one of the hardest things Joe (with no Japanese language training) would ever have to do. But he went and came back scarred but

undeterred. In years following he was sent frequently to New York to train with Shimano Eido Roshi at Daibosatsu (a temple Genki-san considered within his lineage.)

In 1997 Genki Takabayashi announced his retirement, married one of his older students, and moved to Montana. In 1999 he came back to officially install Genjo as his successor, “the second abbot” of the Great Plum Temple. Then, in 2008 Genjo was selected by Shimano Eido Roshi to be his latest Dharma Heir, which means poor Joe is in the hottest seat imaginable following the latest scandal regarding Eido Roshi.

This whole situation breaks my heart. And this is the reason I hope you will take care, dear Kobutsu, in bringing things out into the open. In postscript I must add that in 1987 I made the decision to leave Seattle to become director of the Institute for the Study of Asian Cultures at Pepperdine University in Malibu, CA. Tokugan-ji in the UW district continued on for awhile, with long distance instruction. But it soon closed. One member, Dorothy Kannin Deming-Smith, tried to continue it in her home, but by 2008 her poor health prevented her from keeping it going.

This left Chobo-ji alone in Seattle to carry on in what I considered to be the Zen practice I had started. Genjo led his group in a Zen path that is wonderfully sound. Any of his articles in the Chobo-ji Newsletter is worthy of the whole range of Zen masters on record. His studies with Eido Roshi seemed to go well and several of Genjo’s disciples also trained at Daibosatsu.

Here in the Los Angeles area there are a few Rinzai teachers (outside of Sasaki Roshi on Mt. Baldy, whose lineage Genki deemed “impure”) and two large Soto groups: the Zen Center of Los Angeles and temple, founded by Maezumi Roshi, and Zenshu-ji in Little Tokyo, which largely serves as a mission temple for the Japanese community. The late Maezumi Roshi (who certainly had his share of scandal) mixed the Rinzai and Soto traditions slightly. I have cooperated with both the ZCLA and Zenshu-ji groups ever since moving here 23 years ago.

Ironically, Maezumi’s successor is a Seattleite and former student of mine, Wendy Egyoku Nakao, who left my UW group in the 1970’s to

begin an on-again-off-again relationship with Maezumi's group. She has made striking changes, democratizing the entire operation, bringing transparency to the finances, and Americanizing the practice so that ZCLA is not bound by the enormous Soto hierarchy in Japan. (Egyoku is Japanese American, incidentally, and speaks no Japanese.)

The only one of my direct disciples to establish an on-going Zen group is Dr. Kurt (Kankan) Spellmeyer, a professor of creative writing at Rutgers. His Cold Mountain Sangha (coldmountainsangha.blogspot.com) is flourishing under his thoughtful leadership. Kurt's priest name means Cold Perception. The Cold (Kan 寒) of all priest names in the Cold Mountain lineage is a euphemism for a state of awareness that is complete, deep, enlightened, etc., or as I sometimes say, "stunned" like we are on a morning when we wake up to a silent and still world covered in snow. Of all my disciples, Kurt (Kankan) Spellmeyer is the embodiment of the word. I think he came into his first sesshin that way.

Kurt once visited Daibosatsu Zendo, knowing that Genki and Genjo had history there, but sensed something amiss and decided not to train there. Actually, Shimano Eido Roshi has been an acquaintance of mine for a long time. I had my first conversation with him, by phone, in about 1962, when I was at Columbia refining my conversational Japanese before going to Japan for the first time. I had heard of him, looked him up in the phone book, and we chatted for some time. I spoke to him in Japanese, which he remembered some 10 years later, when I showed up at Daibosatsu with Hirano Osho and my Japanese friend Iwao Takigawa.

They had come from Japan for a Seattle sesshin, and afterwards wanted to make a trip to New York, with me as guide. (They had no idea how far New York was from Seattle.) We participated in the day's sitting schedule and spent the night in the lovely facilities at Daibosatsu. Takigawa had brought a Kutani teabowl that he wanted Shimano to have the first drink of ritual tea in. I prepared it and served it.

I remember that Shimano asked me what my favorite Japanese word was. I told him it was "*arigatai*" (有り難い). He asked me why and I explained that for me it expressed a gratitude that I couldn't find a word for in any other language. He seemed pleased. After leaving Daibosatsu we stayed in Manhattan for a week, visiting places I knew as a boy

studying piano with my teacher at Julliard, and just seeing the sights of the city. (We also saw the musical "Oh, Calcutta!" on Broadway just for fun. No translation was needed.)

Among my other fully ordained, direct disciples are Pamela (Kanshin) Meidell of Ventura, CA, and Samantha (Kanzan) Caccamo of Milan, Italy. They have no plans (as yet) to take on the heavy responsibilities of their own Zen groups. But I mention all of these people to you, from Joe Marinello on down the line, ending up with me and my teachers, only to indicate how Shimano's misconduct can poison the stream, for them and for all the people they touch.

A poem of mine for you, based on the old Zen saying,

GUEST AND HOST: CERTAINLY DIFFERENT.
GUEST AND HOST: OBVIOUSLY THE SAME.

Life is but a dream, and that's a fact.
But if you believe in the holy miracle
 of that dream,
If you enter it and come to know it
 from the inside out,
You join the dream-makers who bring dreamers
 into the grace known as
 Buddhahood.

You don't have to be in a monastery,
 training under a famous abbot,
 to enter that grace.
Do whatever you have to do
To make this whole world your monastery,
 and everything in it your teacher.

With love and gratitude to you, Kobutsu Malone,

Glenn Taylor (Kangan) Webb
August 16, 2010