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Franz wrote,

- > What strikes me most about this recent to-do is that Aitken Roshi was
- > on the case *years* ago and yet nothing happened until a brave woman
- > stood up this June and stuck her shovel into the heap that is Shimano
- > Roshi. It takes a lot to bring down a Zen mountain. (I say this
- > knowing that Shimano's insight into reality is incomparably,
- > inexpressibly deeper than my own; yet I cannot abide his actions over
- > *forty years*.)
- >
- > I know ZCLA—the community I know best—is hardly without sin, but
- > they have progressed *far* beyond this sort of denial. How did Aitken
- > get dragged in, and why weren't his words heard and acted on? Perhaps
- > because of those AZTA members now defending Shimano—and because of
- > the conservatism they represent? Stuart, having read and popularized
- > the Aitken letters, what do you think?

I don't think things are as simple as you wrote above. Things were picking up steam in the Shimano arena well before this "brave woman stood up this June and stuck her shovel into the heap that is Shimano Roshi." As a result of a telephone conversation in July of 2008 with Kobutsu Malone, a Zen priest ordained by Shimano in 1993, Aitken decided to unseal the sealed portion of his extensive papers at the U. of Hawaii at Manoa library. I learned of the files and obtained a photo copy from the University library. I thought the contents of the unsealed files were important, and should be more widely known, so along with Vlad K. owner of www.thezensite.com jointly wrote an article "The Aitken -Shimano Letters". Some time after the files were unsealed they went up on the internet. Interestingly, a section of the files was originally widely distributed in the early 1980's so I was surprised to see them appear in the sealed files. There was nothing secret about that part of the file, so it is strange that Aitken at that late date, after seeing the trouble secrecy caused in the 1960's, still chose to keep important information secret. One reason I think Aitken sealed this part of his papers is that it is clear Soen roshi would not do anything public to reign in or mitigate the power and authority he has given his boy Shimano.

Over the years additional material was added to the original correspondence files. One particularly interesting 1995 letter is to the Zen Studies Society's President from Aitken and seven other Zen teachers including Kapleau outlining Shimano's thirty years of scandal and suggesting he get psychological help or resign. They also mentioned making the letter public if nothing happened. In fact - nothing did happen but the letter, though not made public leaked out. I mentioned the letter in an article some years ago. The files have grown to 333 files and extended forward in time and filled in much other material earlier than 1995. Besides the sexual problems there are clear hints of financial irregularities, for instance file 247. They end with an audio recording of Aitken three days before he died. He calls Shimano "a crook" and says his actions are the "product of a criminal mind."

The driving force behind making things public and keeping the issue alive I believe is Kobutsu Malone. He was the caretaker of Dai Bosatsu Monastery for a number of years. Malone also worked for many years as a prison chaplain including with death row inmates. He eventually broke with Shimano.

Shimano's defenders claimed all the trouble ended in 1993, the last scandal on record. It is a pretty disturbing case described in www.shimanoarchives.com, files 241 and 253. The main defender, Genjo Marinello, an heir of Shimano's claims how close their relationship has been for fifteen years and mentions all the retreats and dokusan they did together and in all that time he never heard of anything troubling or of inappropriate behavior. He and another defender Nonin Chowaney, a Katagiri heir, were dismissive and critical of Malone, myself, Genkaku (Adam Fisher), an ex-Shimano disciple who has a blog, and Aitken. Some how they wondered why Aitken put his name in this? If they had read the files it would be very clear why Aitken was involved.

I believe the most recent woman read the "shimanoarchive" and realized what was happening; that she was but the last name on a long list. It was in this context that she bravely stood up at dinner and announced in front of Shimano and other members of the sangha her two year secret affair with Shimano. This caused havoc with the defenders who have yet to apologize and with the Board of Directors and I assume at least some members of their group. A lot was happening before this woman stood and announced her affair. It did however, break the defenders original defense and shook the BoD out of their complacency. The Zen Studies Society has a long history of their BoDs covering for and protecting their leader.

Now to Aitken. Remember, Shimano's troubles started early in Hawaii while he was with Aitken back in the early 1960's. Aitken found out that Shimano had affairs with two women in his group who subsequently had breakdowns. Aitken secretly went to Japan to tell Soen roshi about the affairs, but he did not seem to care. Soen then took Aitken to Yasutani roshi who cared less. Shimano found out about Aitken's secret trip to Japan and was furious over it. He was so angry that he refused to meet with Aitken upon his return to Hawaii because he did not trust himself, afraid that he would become violent. Shimano then went to New York City. I think Aitken wanted to have Shimano deported but did not for fear of being dropped by Soen and Yasutani, his teachers. He and his wife Anne also felt constrained; especially Anne wanted to keep the names of the woman secret. At any rate as is clear in the letters between Aitken and his two Japanese teachers, Aitken took much of the responsibility for the trouble, while they, Soen and Yasutani took none. Aitken repeatedly assures them that all will be kept "secret." Aitken writes that he views Shimano as having a "pathological personality" and feels bad that he could not convince Soen of this observation. Aitken and his wife took care of one of the women, paying her college tuition and supplying her with room and board, after she left the mental institution.

In 1975 a big scandal erupted in NYC involving Shimano and numerous women. Strangely, in 1976 Aitken, though seeing his worst fears about Shimano's "pathological personality" manifesting, attends the opening ceremony of Dai Bosatsu. I view this as Aitken's coming out party as a roshi in front of a large gathering of Japanese dignitaries and roshi, that he could not resist. I recently heard that Aitken in 1979 wanted to do some thing about Shimano but he unwisely tried to enlist Dick Baker roshi and Maezumi roshi as a team. Unfortunately, unbeknownst to Aitken at the time, both Baker and Maezumi were deep in the same trouble as Shimano, so naturally, nothing came of his efforts. Years went by and Aitken did very little though well informed of continuing trouble. Finally in 1995 he enlisted other Zen teachers and they wrote the above mentioned letter to the President of the Zen Studies Society, but nothing came of it. Aitken and the others kept it secret.

A few years ago I wrote to Aitken asking about the 1960's and later and what happened. He was very glad to help me and clearly was aware that there could be trouble. He wrote a cover letter stating that though he was old, his memory was fine and like that. He was glad that I was writing about Shimano and making public things that were not known at that time. However, he became upset with me when I let it be known that I thought Soen and Yasutani were to a large measure responsible for the trouble and further, they were ineffectual in doing anything about it. I felt this especially so for Soen. That pretty much ended our collaboration. Soen was pretty much broken by the events surrounding Shimano. He died alone after living a reclusive and alcoholic life at Ryutaku-ji monastery. He is a tragic figure.

I believe some years later Kobutsu Malone became embroiled with Shimano. He wrote or called Aitken to ask for counseling concerning his perceived mistreatment from Shimano. I believe Aitken was glad to see Malone confronting Shimano and ready to take him on in the public arena. Aitken was glad to help Malone and this cemented their old and close friendship. I think this was the immediate cause of unsealing the sealed files. Aitken has felt guilty for a long time over keeping the Shimano trouble secret and my guess is he felt responsible from the 1960's on. Over the years, Aitken did precious little, even for a while sat on the stage with Shimano in the late 1970's/early 1980's discussing Zen at large public events. Years went past and he was old, ill and approaching death and wanted to set the record straight, but it was too late to do it himself. He offered assistance to others who would do that work. He has been a great assistance to Kobutsu and they developed an especially endearing closeness near the end of Aitken's life. Aitken's last public words summed up his view of Shimano, "he is a crook" and his actions are the "product of his criminal mind". Aitken also spoke of the women who came forward to the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society saying "I am awed by their courage; I want to give them all the possible encouragement I can."