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Mr Shimano, please stand down

Editorial, The Buddhist Channel, Jan 3, 2011

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia -- The *Vinaya* of the Theravada Buddhist tradition have a term to describe four repugnant acts. Called the *Parajikas* (defeats), these rules entail expulsion from the Sangha for life. If a monk breaks any one of the rules he is automatically 'defeated' in the holy life and falls from monkhood immediately.

He is not allowed to become a monk again in his lifetime. Intention is necessary in all these four cases to constitute an offence. The four parajikas for monks are:

1. Sexual intercourse, that is, any voluntary sexual interaction between a monk and a living being, except for mouth-to-mouth intercourse which falls under the Sanghadisesa
2. Stealing, that is, the robbery of anything worth more than 1/24 troy ounce of gold (as determined by local law)
3. Intentionally bringing about the death of a human being, even if it is still an embryo - whether by killing the person, arranging for an assassin to kill the person, inciting the person to die, or describing the advantages of death
4. Deliberately lying to another person that one has attained a superior human state, such as claiming to be an Arahant when one knows one is not, or claiming to have attained one of the jhanas when one knows one hasn't (see: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patimokkha>).



Of course, traditionally speaking, in Rinzai and Soto Zen Buddhist schools, the Vinaya is not part of its Sangha makeup, and thus rules such as these parajikas are not recognized.

Yet, the Dharma teachers from these schools - many assuming the titles of "Roshi" - wear robes that are recognizable to any practicing Buddhists. After all, the aim of Zen practice is to discover this Buddha-nature within each person, through meditation and practice of the Buddha's teachings, just like any other schools.

When these teachers step outside their temples and meditation sanctuaries, and wander across borders to countries where Buddhism are endemic in the local scene, they will be greeted with the same veneration as other monks.

Regardless of the Zen or Theravada traditions, the monks are called "Venerables", and regular lay folks put their palms together and make prostrations before them. They do this out of respect for the robes, and of veneration for the person who has taken the vows and precepts, principles and values of the Dharma which are embodied in the robes that he wears.

And when the wearer of these robes give Dharma presentations, many take heart from the spoken words. For the listeners, these are not just mere utterances, but teachings of Dharma - words when sincerely put to work may lead one to spiritual transformation.

Any Zen teachers making trips to South East and East Asia will testify to this. This brings us to the matter of one senior Venerable based in the United States called Eido Shimano.

Mr. Shimano, now 77, has been the abbot of the Zen Studies Society (<http://www.daibosatsu.org/>) since 1965. For much of that time, there have been rumors about the married abbot's sexual liaisons, with his students and with other women. The rumors began to unravel when, in 2008, the University of Hawaii at Manoa unsealed some papers donated by Roshi Robert Aitken (1917-2010), a leading American Buddhist and founder of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (<http://www.bpf.org/>).

The papers included files (http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html) about Mr. Shimano that Roshi Aitken kept from 1964 to 2003. Roshi Aitken, who died Aug. 5, met Mr. Shimano when both men worked in Hawaii in the 1960s, and for more than 40 years he kept notes on his colleague's liaisons, based on conversations with women who had confided in him.

The Aitken papers were soon circulating on the Internet. On July 19, 2010 the Zen Studies Society's board announced that Mr. Shimano had resigned from the board after being confronted with allegations of "clergy misconduct." The statement was sent in response to inquiries from *Tricycle*, a magazine about Buddhism. This statement of resignation, issued in the name of Mr. Shimano, was also circulated widely on the internet (http://www.shimanoarchive.com/PDFs/20100907_Shimano_Sangha.pdf).

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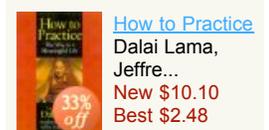
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Then in a surprising turn of events, Mr Shimano wrote to the New York Times on December 1, 2010 denying that he had resigned based on the accusations of clergy misconduct. His letter to the NYT can be viewed here (http://www.shimanoarchive.com/PDFs/20101201_Shimano_NYT.pdf).

The twist and turn of this saga serves to highlight the unstable psychological state of Mr. Shimano. Thanks to the internet, so much information about this on-going case have been made available for public viewing. For the more discerning, the information points to a consistency of behavioral abuse of one who have been wearing the robes. And based on the latest events, there are concrete evidence of wanton, crass denial and a pattern of avoidance on the part of Mr. Shimano.

The Zen Studies Society's board must understand that at this moment, the issue is no longer a matter which falls exclusively within the borders of its organization. The person in question is a renowned Buddhist teacher, who is listed on the list of notable Buddhists (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Buddhists#Zen_teachers).

He wears the robes, and his words still evidently do influence people. Mr. Shimano may well not have any regards for the Vinaya, but as a wearer of the robes recognized by all Buddhists throughout the world, and being a "notable" Buddhist himself, he owes it to himself, to the Dharma and above all, to all those whom he have hurt directly or indirectly.

And if he sincerely believes in the wisdom of Buddha Dharma, and regards the attainment of enlightenment above all else, we pray that he will for once do the right thing.

Mr. Shimano, as it is, Eido Roshi is spiritually dead. Mr. Shimano, in the name of the Buddha Dharma, we implore you to do the right thing.

Mr. Shimano, please stand down.

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