

Mr. Joe Soun Dowling,
ZSS Board President
New York Zendo Shobo-Ji
223 East 67th Street
New York, NY, 10065

Dear Joe,

I am writing in support of the many other American Zen teachers who have already written urging you and the Board to disassociate yourselves completely from Eido Shimano.

As a former abbot and leader at the San Francisco Zen Center, I lived through our troubles there with Richard Baker Roshi. So I appreciate the pain and complexity of what you are dealing with. I understand that expressions of dismay and outrage that reference professional standards and psychological syndromes, while probably true and certainly important, do not fully capture the reality that you face. Despite Eido's many serious transgressions, I am sure that in your experience, and in that of others in the sangha, he still appears, at least in part, as a powerful and wise teacher, and that to cast him out may well feel like betraying your own practice of these many years.

My own experience is that this is not so. To be faithful to a teacher and a teaching is to do the strong and difficult thing when required to do so. Though he may resist it with all his heart, there is no doubt that what Eido needs and wants from his students is toughness and honesty in times of crisis. No doubt this is what he himself has always tried to manifest. Now it is your turn to give him the courtesy and respect he deserves by being strong and awakened in your response to his conduct. Though your excluding him will be difficult for him, I think it will also be of great benefit. He deserves this expression of courageous love and appreciation – you can do what you need to do without demonizing or diagnosing him. Not to respond strongly and clearly is to collude with him at his worst rather than to assume his best. It is time to cut through with kind, simple and straightforward action.

I think we in the West have been mistaken in imagining that in Asia teachers control their sanghas absolutely. This is not the case. Teacher misconduct is not tolerated anywhere in Asia, and the disciplining of teachers is not inconsistent with the necessary respect and obedience for the teacher that is essential for Zen practice. The reason teacher misconduct is not tolerated in Asia is no less true here: bad conduct that goes unaddressed weakens the entire Dharma community. This is why so many letters from Zen teachers have been filling your mailbox: your problems are ours. The days of American Zen lineages as closed family systems is over. Zen practice cannot survive unless we realize that we are responsible to each other – and that we are here to support each other.

Know then that you and the ZSS Board must take this strong action not only for Eido, and not only for yourselves, but for us as well. And know that many of us stand ready and willing to support you in whatever way you need.

Thank you for reading and considering this letter.

Yours,

Zoketsu Norman Fischer
Former co-abbot, San Francisco Zen Center - Founder and teacher, Everyday Zen Foundation