

From Chikudo Lew Richmond, Sensei

January 4, 2011

Dear Joe Soun,

Regarding the recent distressing news regarding Eido Shimano, I am relieved and gratified that something is finally being done and that the Zen world is finally speaking out. I have known about Shimano's conduct since 1981, through private correspondence and conversation with Robert Aitken Roshi, and in the decades that followed I have seen allegations repeatedly surface, followed by some flurry of activity, and then nothing. This happened many times.

It is not easy to deal with the malfeasance of one's own teacher. As a Board member and teacher at the San Francisco Zen Center, I was one of the people instrumental in confronting Richard Baker, then Abbot, about his misconduct. That confrontation eventually led to his resignation and departure. (All of this has been recounted in detail in the book *Shoes Outside the Door* by Michael Downing, which should be required reading for any individual or Sangha in a similar situation). It was the most difficult thing I have ever done. Exhausted from the effort and ashamed of my own inability to act sooner, I too resigned and left. I took off my robes and went back to being a very private citizen. I also contracted a life-threatening illness. It was terrible. The whole experience derailed my Zen practice for the better part of a decade.

When I look back now and ask myself, Was it worth it? My answer is yes, absolutely. Whatever modest abilities I now have to function as a Zen teacher I attribute largely to that time in 1983 when it became necessary to take a stand--along with my dharma brothers and sisters at the San Francisco Zen Center.

One observation that might be of use to those who have been harmed or victimized: there is nothing that cuts through fast talk faster than a civil lawsuit. It is also worth noting that the Zen Studies Society, like all Buddhist centers, does not exist in some parallel universe, it exists in the state of New York, with its laws and courts. Of course, Buddhism has its own laws as well. Shakyamuni Buddha himself laid down the Vinaya, the standards of conduct for the Sangha, and in every sect and every school, those standards have been honored down to the present time throughout the Buddhist world. If we are true to our practice and to our lineage, we must rise to that standard, whatever the cost. Some would say that the secular courts are not the place to adjudicate spiritual matters. That is what the Catholic Church professed too. They were mistaken.

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