

A leaked dialog on the private AZTA American Zen Teacher's Association listserve:

Another appeal to the Zen Studies Society, Jan 7: first from Grace Shireson, then Roshi Joan

by Joan Halifax on Sunday, January 9, 2011 at 8:43am

from Grace Shireson

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

PHONE [REDACTED] FAX [REDACTED]

January 7, 2011

Dear Joe Soun Dowling,

We have recently heard from Shinge Roshi on the AZTA group email list news of the upcoming ZSS Board meeting. I congratulate you all on Shinge Roshi's ascending the Mountain Seat, and am sympathetic regarding the current difficulties at ZSS, and your responsibilities for the sangha at this extremely complex time. Three concerned Hoen-ji sangha members have written to me, two of their letters are already in the Shimano archive and mainly express their perceptions (or misperceptions) of Shinge Roshi's loyalty to Shimano and the meaning of enlightenment—subjects that most Zen teachers have struggled with in our own training. All three of the letters from Roko's students emphasize her strong ability as a Zen teacher, with concern about the ZSS loyalty to Shimano and his identity as an enlightened being. They may have misperceived ZSS leadership statements, and also, ZSS views may have changed.

We have heard that Eido Shimano has given over the reins to Shinge Roshi (and the Board I presume), can we now look to ZSS leadership to make this situation right after so many years of harm to sangha members? If you could share in any way the obstacles you face, we would rush to support your intentions, just as we have already done. It seems to me, all Zen teachers and Zen itself will be affected by what you do to correct this situation since the perception is that now indeed, the reins are in your hands. Your leadership in taking on the removal of Eido Shimano from ZSS is being carefully observed and supported by the Zen community. This is an historic moment for Zen in the West; the Mahasangha is setting standards that ethical misbehavior will not be tolerated even from so-called gifted teachers.

In my view, the current volume of letters from Zen teachers being written to the ZSS Board came about because of Shimano's letter to the NYT in which he denied the cause and effect of his retirement and the (so-called false) allegations about his misconduct.

The letter (in effect) negated Shimano's apology, and was in a sense a "denial" of the facts. Please consider that this letter is in anticipation of your Monday January 10th Board meeting as support for following the FaithTrust Institute's recommendation.

As a Zen teacher, someone who is concerned about Zen's credibility in the West, I want to personally request that the following matters be considered by the ZSS Board regarding Eido Shimano's actual retirement. Besides implementing the suggestions in the letters of Abbess Chozen Bays and Abbess Egyoku Nakao (for a rigorous ethical policy and healing council for sangha) I have only added one request that did not appear in the FaithTrust report—that Rev. Shimano apologize for his letter to the NYT-- since it happened after their report-- and that his apology specifically refer to his Shimano's breach of the Buddhist precepts.

1. Eido Shimano should not be teaching on the grounds or under the auspices of ZSS (as recommended by FaithTrust). This means he should not have a residence or office at DBZ or Shoboji in NYC.
2. Under the current retirement agreement with ZSS, despite the recommendations of Faith Trust, he may continue to offer teaching at sesshin and also teach his Dharma class (in Japanese). I agree with the Faith Trust recommendations and do not think any of this teaching should continue.
3. I agree with the Faith Trust recommendations and do not think that Eido Shimano should continue to see any students (even "old" students) under the auspices of ZSS as was previously decided by the Board of ZSS.
4. A public statement regarding these changes should be made, just as ZSS publicly stated previously that he would continue teachings at sesshin and continue seeing "old" students under the previous retirement agreement. The previous retirement agreement is publicly available, and I think that it should be corrected—publicly.
5. Since he negated his apology with his letter to the NYT which was published on various sites on the internet, including this AZTA list, he should apologize again publicly and include an apology for the letter he wrote to the NYT. I would like to see Shimano's apology include an admission that he broke the Buddhist precepts.

With gratitude for your service in Dharma,

Abbess Myoan Grace Schireson, Ph.D.

FROM ROSHI JOAN HALIFAX

Dear Grace, (and Roko),

Thanks for the skillful letter, Grace. I wholeheartedly support your position in this matter, and I presume that the ZSS will too, as will you, Roko.

I think we all are awaiting word from the ZSS and you, Roko, plus Ryutakuji, Eido Shimano's home temple, with regards to this matter. A "no comment" at this time is not acceptable, and will be considered a sanctioning of this unfortunate situation. We are all aware that stepping aside and justifying in the matter is no longer a possibility.

A few more details that might be considered:

- Is the board meeting face to face with each other to discuss these deliberations? I would encourage that the board do this, as email and phone calls are not adequate in these circumstances.
- If there is litigation around Eido Shimano's issues, who is financially responsible for the costs? Will the board make a clear agreement regarding this with Eido Shimano?
- Who is helping the ZSS board sort this out with Eido Shimano? I imagine that he would hold fast to whatever he has left (from pension to students and housing), and the board will need outside help to negotiate successfully in this transition. I imagine that board members and his students are too close to him to do this successfully.
- Will Eido Shimano continue his residency at DBZ and the NY city site? That would seem highly problematic. Will he return to his home temple in Japan? And do his Japanese colleagues know what is happening?
- What sanctions are you applying to Eido Shimano other than insisting on his retirement?
- And the third thing you, Grace, have already mentioned but I hope we will see carefully addressed and implemented: What are the remedies the ZSS has planned for the victims and the sangha with regards to Eido Shimano's actions?

I again want to thank you, Grace, and so many of you for the thoughtful discussion around this issue. I hope we will find a path through this that is timely and wise. I think the example AZTA is setting is important, as Eido Shimano is not the only person in the Zen community who has violated sexual boundaries with students. At this time, we are setting an important precedent and a path of recourse for those women and sanghas who have been put into this untenable situation.

Gratefully,

Joan Halifax

Founding Abbot

Upaya Zen Center

(AN INTERESTING TURN OF EVENTS: GRACE AND I WERE PUBLICLY BULLIED BY ONE OF THE AZTA ZEN TEACHERS FOR OUR COMMUNIQUE, INTERESTING PUSH BACK TO SAY THE LEAST. THIS IS JUST ONE MORE PIECE IN THE PUZZLE OF THE CONFOUNDING BEHAVIOR THAT HAS SURROUNDED THE SITUATION WITH EIDO SHIMANO AND A TYPICAL RESPONSE WHEN WOMEN STAND TOGETHER AGAINST VIOLATIONS OF THIS KIND. HEREIN A REDACTED VERSION OF ONE EXCHANGE, AFTER THE FIRST EMAIL FROM HIM TELLING GRACE AND ME TO (EXCUSE THE LANGUAGE) "BUTT OUT." :

FROM ROSHI JOAN

dear XXXX, i don't know you, except from this list. but in case you haven't guessed, i have not backed down about much in my life; and i certainly am not interested in backing down on this issue either. perhaps this issue has not touched you in the same way it has touched many women, including myself.

and XXXX, if you don't wish to read my emails, please do not open them. that is the easiest solution for you, so as not to waste your time on persons or issues you don't agree with.

kind regards, rjoan

His response to me:

Joan,

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Your statement about the issue not touching me in the way it has touched women is nothing but a red herring and a manifestation of 70's feminism, which most people, especially savvy women, have gotten beyond.

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XXXXX

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As one might imagine, this caused the usual waves of outrage and indifference in our buddhist colleagues. And hopefully, we will never be passive toward issues related to violence toward women and gender disparity.