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Pressure mounts on Zen Studies Society to suspend and expel Eido Shimano

The Buddhist Channel, Jan 10, 2010

Board of Directors to vote on Jan 10 to decide on the society's association with Eido Shimano

York, USA -- It is learnt that the Zen Studies Society Board of Directors is meeting today to vote on its association with Eido Shimano, who was abbot from 1965 until his recent "retirement" in 2010.



<< Screenshot taken today from the Zen Studies Society website (www.daibosatsu.org/) with a picture of Eido Shimano

Shimano, a Rinzai Zen Buddhist Master and Roshi was a student of Soen Nakagawa. He came to the United States in 1960 and helped to establish the Zen Studies Society based in New York in 1965.

While acknowledged in the "List of Notable Buddhists" under the Zen Teachers category (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Buddhists), Shimano recently acquired a seedy reputation which claimed that he had over many years sexually assaulted many of his female followers.

These claims are published in the "Shimano Archives" (<http://www.shimanoarchive.com/>).

On July 19, 2010 the Zen Studies Society's board announced that Shimano had resigned from the board after being confronted with allegations of "clergy misconduct." This statement of resignation, issued in the name of Mr. Shimano, was circulated widely on the internet (http://www.shimanoarchive.com/PDFs/20100907_Shimano_Sangha.pdf).

Furor erupted within the American Zen circle when 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 Buddhist press and the blogosphere were inundated with protests, mainly from the American Zen fraternity. Many denounced his about turn and called for his expulsion from the Zen Studies Society (see: <http://monkeymindonline.blogspot.com/2010/12/letters-from-zen-teachers-to-zen.html>).

Key leaders and teachers continue to express their urge to the Zen Studies Society to disassociate themselves with their founder, on the basis of the allegations of sexual misconduct.

The following are two letters obtained by the Buddhist Channel expressing similar sentiments elsewhere.

Letter by Adam Genkaku Fisher ¹

January 10, 2011

To Joe Soun Dowling (joedwl@aol.com), president of the Zen Studies Society Board of Directors

Dear Joe Soun Dowling -- I recognize that today's vote about the future of Eido Tai Shimano and his relationship with Zen Studies Society must be enormously difficult. So much confusion, anger, love, uncertainty and downright bitterness has filled the air that it cannot be easy. Thank you for your efforts.

But as a nobody-Zen-student, I would like to urge you and your fellow board members one last time: Please, please, please make a clean break. No if's, and's, but's, or lofty compromises.

PLEASE. Listen to the Faith-Trust Institute.

Listen to the pleas that have erupted in any number of quarters. If even the American Zen Teachers Association can speak up a little ... well, it can't all be vitriol and vindictiveness, do you think?

The penalty for compromising or fudging a response to all this will be a death knell for Zen Studies Society and a blot on the banner of Zen Buddhism in America.

This is not just argumentative hyperbole. Please, please, please consider it. Please make a clean, clear break.

With respect,
Adam Genkaku Fisher

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Letter by MuShin Frank, LoCicero ²

January 10, 2010

To: The Zen Studies Society Board of Directors
From: Mu Shin Frank LoCicero, Former Zen Studies Society Board Member

Dear Board Members:

It is my understanding that today a vote will be taken with respect to the relationship Reverend Shimano will have with Zen Studies Society. It is my recommendation that the Society sever all ties with Reverend Shimano.

Recall that the Zen Studies Society was established in 1956 by Cornelius Crane to help assist the scholar Daisetz Teitaro Suzuki in his work and to help promulgate Zen Buddhism to Western countries. In 1965 with the help of others, Reverend Shimano took over the administration of the Society. However within ten years he had seriously shamed and damaged the credibility of the Society.

Still, in 1982 an unfortunately small number of us on the board saw that the only right way to proceed with respect to the number of problems presented by the Reverend Shimano was expulsion. We came to this conclusion after much discussion and consideration. However, perhaps, it was critically erroneous that we did not make it widely known that we did have the support of Eido's teacher Soen Nakagawa, Roshi.

Soen Roshi told Jochi that "Eido's shame is Soen's shame, the shame of Dai Bosatsu is the shame of Ryutaku-ji and every Buddhist monastery in the world." Soen Roshi told me "Eido Roshi is No Roshi."

Since Jochi had already resigned, we did not have even a simple majority on the board for expulsion, but the recognition of the seriousness of the problem by the other members of that board resulted in compromise which was for Rev. Shimano to take a leave of absence. Sadly, that leave did no good. At the time I did not see any possibility of changing enough of that board's mind, I regrettably resigned, and walked away from Zen Studies Society.

Sadly, even some 28 years later there has been no evidence of real improvement in Rev. Shimano's behavior.

Now with the support of many - many in the Maha Sangha, and many Zen Teachers, I ask again that Eido be dismissed from Zen Studies Society. Thereafter the Society will have to work hard and skillfully to restore the reputation of practice at the Society's temples.

Gassho,
Mu Shin Frank LoCicero

Editor's note:

- 1) Adam Genkaku Fisher was a student of the late Kyudo Nakagawa-Roshi and is the founder of Black Moon Zendo
- 2) MuShin Frank, LoCicero is a former Zen Studies Society Board Member

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