

Steven N.
The Netherlands

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Netherlands

To the Board of the ZSC and all residents of Dai Bosatsu Zendo

and in particular to: Seigan Ed Glassing, Seiko Susan Morningstar, Fujin Attale Formhals, Sekine, Chisho, Nyoden, Steve “Tenzo”, Junpo Dennis Kelly, Subaru, Nancy O’Hara, Andrea, Holly, Shiun, Koshin Patrice Northam, and all other fellow students whose names I cannot remember but who supported me so wonderfully at Dai Bosatsu Zendo when I was there in 1991 and 1992

Hi.

I am Steven Noomen from Holland, a former lay student of Mr. Shimano at Bai Bosatsu Zendo, and I write this letter to let you all know I am utterly appalled to hear about his behaviour that made him decide – clearly very much overdue – to “retire” as abbott.

This information I got from the “Aitken – Shimano

letters”:http://www.thezensite.com/ZenEssays/CriticalZen/Aitken_Shimano_Letters.html

Mr. Shimano’s behaviour brought much shame and disgrace to himself, to his family, to Zen Buddhism in general, and to the Rinzai Zen tradition in particular. It is no longer fashionable today, but people from samurai families – like Mr. Shimano, I heard – would rather kill themselves than live with such shame and disgrace.

However, much more importantly than just (!) the shame, it caused very much harm in countless ways, in the first place by obscuring instead of demonstrating the right way to live the Buddha Dharma, and thus confusing countless seekers. The Aitken-Shimano letters speak for themselves.

Soen Nakagawa Roshi knew about it, but did nothing. It was a grave mistake to regard him fit for the job, and he didn’t set it straight, which was a grave mistake too. He could have prevented much harm.

When I was at DBZ my fellow students told me that it was nothing but an exaggeration of some sensation hungry and trigger, or rather, pen happy reporter that wanted to blow up one small thing that once had happened years ago.

However, now it seems to me this means their minds were already heavily poisoned. The general attitude seemed to be something like: “You can think whatever you want, but Roshi

is above all serious criticism, no matter what, because you know nothing and he is a roshi. And why should you judge or get involved at all? It is not your business.”

Of course it is my business! Very much so. If I'm there as a student, then I demand at the very least some sincerity of the one in charge. Nyogen Senzaki reminded us at his death bed “minute after minute watch your steps closely.” However, for nearly forty years Mr. Shimano stubbornly refused to see and admit his mistakes were mistakes.

As for myself, I feel now deeply ashamed of having been part of such a deceitful tradition. And be sure all Zen groups in Holland will know about it and I will NEVER refer to Mr. Shimano as “Roshi” any more.

Also it seems that Mr. Shimano passed on his “wisdom” to his close students. When I was there in 1992 Junpo Dennis Kelly, his foremost student and then dharma heir, left DBZ. He was remembered as a horny macho who prided himself in saying things like “When you didn't sleep with a student during Kessei, then it was not a good Kessei.”

Gosh, it is appalling to see how much damage is done by justifying irresponsible behaviour with the Buddha Dharma. And especially if that happens at places where people teach what is the Buddha Dharma and what not, then we have already ended up in a pretty hopeless situation.

I remember Seigan telling me the following as a preparation for my first dokusan: “Ask him any question you have. He not just knows the Dharma, he IS the Dharma.”

That sounds pretty confused and pretty confusing, and it brings to mind what Nyogen Senzaki's grandfather said at his death bed: “Even though you have told me that you want to become a monk, when I look at the way Buddhism is now in Japan, I am afraid you may regret it. So think it over.”

Well, my impression is that things haven't gotten any better. I'm no big Buddhist or anything, let alone a teacher. What I have learned is that the heart recognises what is both true and relevant in any given situation, and the ability to live from that recognition, each and every moment afresh, is what we by our Zen practise aspire to develop through transformation of the mind.

But Buddhism seems often to have slipped into ingratiation, into accepting anything no matter what, and then confusing such philosophical cheesiness with compassion and wisdom. That is just sick.

Such acceptance, perhaps indeed gained by much struggle on a zafu, is supposed to

nurture the basic aspiration, to support it, not to replace it! And surely it is not supposed to nurture and support deceitful excuses that justify irresponsible behaviour.

For nearly twenty years I had this big calligraphy made by Mr. Shimano hanging on my wall. It says just one word: "Shin" – heartmind.

I took it down.

"An insincere and evil friend is more to be feared than a wild beast; a wild beast may wound your body, but an evil friend will wound your mind." ~ Buddha

Sad gassho

Steven Noomen