

June 23, 2011

An Open Letter to Eido Tai Shimano

Eido Roshi,

I was moved to make this public appeal by the recent report from Shobo-ji. We were told that you had tried to enter the building, using your key, and had to find that the lock had been changed by order of the Board of Directors. Your stubborn refusal to accept the Board's injunction, treating ZSS property as your own, alas is not surprising. But, it was an image of an old Teacher locked out of what for him is his "house", the house that "he'd built", left standing on the sidewalk - that image, in itself, was piercing.

Do you have to continue to subject yourself and, by extension, all of us to these never-ending humiliations? When will be the end of it all for you and for Zen Studies Society? And what will be left "standing", once all will be said and done in whatever manner?

This is what moved me to write this open appeal to you. It was written out of great worry for the future of ZSS and, out of compassionate feelings towards you personally. This is a sincere "cry of the heart"; I do not intend to embarrass or to confront you in any way. There is no malice in it.

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Roshi,

How do you want to be remembered? What will be your legacy to all of us? With your reputation compromised repeatedly over many years, and, seemingly destroyed to the point of the near-death of ZSS and nearly total ostracism by the Buddhist community at large - What is still remaining to be salvaged? I believe that you do have a way to reclaim your dignity in this moment, leaving the historical record as it was, and regardless of your attitude towards what was alleged again and again.

Please look us at how this record stands, just as it is.

Do you want to be remembered as that very talented and ambitious young Zen priest, who came to Hawaii, leaving behind a series of obscure "problems" in Japan?

Do you want to be remembered as that exciting and new Zen voice, who had to leave Hawaii, escaping exposure and condemnation by Buddhist community there?

Do you want to be remembered as that domineering Abbot, who created an organization to support, promote and defend his image, filling successive ZSS Boards of Directors with his students and making them the instrument of his will-- an organization only in name, with no confirmed membership, no procedures to assure participation and growth of the ZSS Sangha?

Do you want to be remembered as that Teacher whose students continued to withdraw from study and practice because of repeated violations of the vows which you chanted with them, every day, at the Morning Service? How many dedicated students and practitioners had left or never came to ZSS because of your unspeakable conduct with women students? Do you remember your own Teacher's ambivalence towards you?

Do you want to be remembered as that Teacher whose Dharma Heirs had been alienated or "banished" altogether - their names never mentioned, causing the continuity and validity of Dharma Transmission to be questioned in the eyes of students and lay practitioners?

Do you want to be remembered as a Head Priest of Shobo-ji, who maintained a private apartment in the Zendo, living, as you did, a few blocks away, while a Senior Monk - who administered the Zendo, had to live in a space not larger than a closet and, that, for ten years?

Do you want to be remembered as that unquestionable leader, and only public face of ZSS, whose conduct alienated original supporters and donors, bringing ZSS close to financial ruin?

Do you want to be remembered as a recipient of trust, substantial funds and bequests from many persons whom we honor in the Founders Hall, a trust you had broken both in spirit and in letter of their generous intent.

Do you want to be remembered as an Abbot, dismissed from office, locked out of his Zendo, who negotiated a settlement with ZSS which, allegedly, threatens to bring the organization close to insolvency?

All this is a matter of public record of one kind or another.  
Is it your wish that this be remembered as your story, our story?

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Roshi,

Please consider this:

You can be remembered as that tireless Zen priest, whose fiery spirit and understanding of Dharma reached the hearts and changed the minds of numerous people, young and old, in America.

You can be remembered as that dedicated Zen Monk, who made scores of people in New York commit themselves to your missionary vision and underwrite your grand ambition of bringing Rinzai Zen to the US.

You can be remembered for your unforgettable Dharma Talks, for your penetrating and provocative questions which moved your students closer to a deeper understanding of Dharma.

You can be remembered as that brilliant and inspiring monk who moved many people to make Dai Bosatsu Zendo and Shoboji a glorious reality.

You can be remembered as a diligent messenger of Dharma, translating, publishing, and bringing wisdom to others at every opportunity.

You can be remembered as a Teacher who brought the profound tradition of Rinzai practice to these shores and taught it to all who came.

All this is also a matter of public record.

So, it will all depend from which vantage point the record will be read. You can write a different end to this story. Please leave us a legacy we can build on.

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Roshi,

Please consider this:

Surprise everybody with bold and decisive action!

Call on the Board to begin preparations for an In-gathering & Reconciliation Process. As a part of it, convene a meeting of all your Dharma Heirs and former students. Let them begin their dialogue without your overweening presence. Encourage the Board to seek council from other Buddhist organizations that had gone through such process. Encourage ZSS to undergo an organizational reform; without you their authority is not supported by anything valid or real. Make your negotiations, regarding your severance package, more transparent. It might, so hope many of us, reassure people that your entitlements will not be satisfied at the expense of ZSS solvency.

Consider a legal transfer of your coop apartment in Manhattan to its rightful owner, The Zen Studies Society, and confirm this openly & legally immediately, leaving no room for innuendoes & suspicions.

Start the process of transformation, then, withdraw. You are, for some of us, forever our Teacher. Those who feel that way will continue to seek your guidance in practice. Others will see an example of Buddhist precepts and Zen Rinzai spirit in practice.

We do not, any longer, wait for an explanation or an apology from you, Roshi. But, we are entitled to be considered, while your relationship with ZSS moves to an end.

Wake up, Roshi! You are a Zen Master! Have courage in this time of inevitable change- - take a leap! Change everything!

Gassho,

Zogen