

An Open Letter To: Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat, Abbot, and Board Members of Zen Studies Society.

From: Olivia ([REDACTED])

Date: August 22, 2011

I am writing this open letter in anticipation of your August 26-28, 2011 meeting at Dai Bosatsu Zendo. Since I am unable to attend, this letter will serve as my contribution for sharing with the group as solicited in Rev. Shinge Sherry Chayat's letter to the Zen Studies Society Sangha on August 4, 2011. I received a Dharma name from Eido Shimano and served for some time as Tenzo.

One year and 2 months ago, I came across Robert Aitken Roshi's blog in which he called out Eido Shimano for the many reports of his abuse of women over a 40 year period. What followed has been a renewed and unprecedented outpouring of public statements. The overall intent has been to help Zen Studies Society disassociate completely from Eido Shimano while empathizing with complex and difficult loyalties. To date this clean and strong separation has not occurred for the benefit of all. As some letters have pointed out, such a separation could even lead to the benefit of Eido Shimano himself.

Largely missing from these public statements are first hand public letters from actual female victims of Eido Shimano. Many female victims have gone to great lengths and personal sacrifice to bring their experiences directly to the attention of the current board and previous boards, but have not gotten the response they hoped for: understanding of their experience and changes in policies that reflect that understanding. Perhaps this is because there remains some confusion about what constitutes a consensual "love affair" as opposed to sexual abuse and intentional deception (psychological abuse). Although I have a right to protect my privacy, as do Sangha members engaging in a healing weekend, I feel a responsibility to myself and others not to continue to hold in secrecy actions that damaged me and others. Until the past is fully acknowledged and the current board has taken fully appropriate actions as indicated by many people, the conditions for real, lasting, and deep healing are not in place.

To the extent that I was not healed enough from abuse prior to meeting Eido Shimano, that complicated my initial inability to say "no" to his sexual advances and run fast and far, I offer my deep apology to the Sangha and greater Zen world for being any part of the anguish and divisions that followed.

I ask that you accept this heart-felt letter and all that it contains (including this introduction) to be read by Rev. Shinge Sherry Chayat, or Rev. Genjo Joe Marinello during this upcoming meeting, and to include it in the minutes of your next board meeting.

While a new resident at Dai Bosatsu Zendo, I was sitting alone in the upstairs library room totally engaged in drawing a copy of a beautiful ceiling to floor

Japanese *sumi-e* brush painting of Jizo Bodhisattva. Eido Shimano came into the room, sat next to me, and told me the very moving story behind the creation of that original brush painting. He then placed his arm around me and kissed me on the lips.

At the time I was young and very vulnerable. At the age of 16 I had been raped and sexually abused by a popular teacher at my high school for a period of one year. When I sought protection and help, the people I spoke with often responded with disbelief or with concern for the reputation of the school. Survival at that time often meant I had to pretend that nothing out of the ordinary was occurring. It wasn't until I learned that a friend had the same experience with this teacher that we found the mutual validation to reveal the teacher's abuse to the principal. Nothing changed in part because laws protecting students were not in place or made public as they are today.

When Eido Shimano made his sexual advance, he was aware of my history of being abused. My immediate thought was, "Oh please, not this again". He told me that he felt he could help me have a "good experience" rather than a traumatic one. All I felt was incredible anxiety. Yet, even while my whole being shrank from him, I was unable to articulate for myself why his sentiment didn't seem sincere. I had no sexual desire for him and felt sickened by the complications of such a relationship with a prominent Zen teacher and a married man. When I asked about his wife, whom I had never met, he sighed and shook his head, then said she was mentally unwell and living in Japan. When I couldn't think of any other "reason" to say no to him, something in me froze, and I felt unable to stop him from continuing with his advances.

That night was the first of many sexual meetings over more than a year, always initiated by Eido Shimano. For example, he would signal me in a hallway or during *Dokusan* he would ask me to come up to his private apartment. While at home visiting my parents during a Christmas holiday, he called and asked me to meet him in NYC. He also insisted that I keep these meetings a secret because it could cause him difficulties. Only many years later was I able to understand why I was incapable of rejecting his sexual advances. It was far from a consensual relationship between equals. He exploited the spiritual trust I had placed in him and impeded my own innate ability for healing and personal strength. He exploited my isolation from my family and outside friends, and his knowledge that I had been abused previously. Our relationship was not "healing" for me and the ending was very traumatic. That ending, as well as how I became a resident at DBZ, is a story in itself and too lengthy to include in this letter.

One important issue I have not seen in writings regarding Eido Shimano was the fact that he spread sexually transmitted diseases from his multiple relationships. While a resident at DBZ, I had absolutely no sexual contact with any other person anywhere. Eido Shimano, however, was simultaneously sexually active with at least two other female residents, as I later found out. I became aware of one of these relationships near the end of my stay, and learned about the other woman after leaving DBZ. I now know that it's possible he had other sexual liaisons as well, with residents, students at the NYC Zendo, or nonresident

students. Eido Shimano led me to believe that our relationship was exclusive, though.

During a sesshin I developed symptoms of a sexually transmitted disease. When I told Eido Shimano, he said he was suffering from the same symptoms. I told him that I needed to go home immediately to a doctor who could diagnose and treat it. Eido Shimano gave me a glass jar containing a sample of his urine and asked me to take it to the doctor. He asked me to submit it anonymously because he needed to remain at DBZ to lead sesshin. I thought it highly unlikely that a doctor would test the sample under such circumstances, and I was right.

I found out that I had a fully treatable STD. Eido Shimano later told me that he had also received medical treatment. He said he would never forget the discomfort of that sesshin. However, that experience did not keep him from disregarding the health and safety of other female students – or himself – at that time or in the future. This experience caused me to begin to move toward leaving DBZ. Although I eventually gave my entire story to members of the board (this letter reflects my partial story), nothing was done to remove Eido Shimano for the safety of his female students and their present or future partners. His needs and self interests, and the reputation of Zen Studies Society, continued to be the primary concern of a complicit board, at the cost of common moral integrity, the precepts, and the well being of students. I was fortunate not to have been infected with any other STD, especially a life-threatening one. In 1990, Katy Butler published an article called “Encountering the Shadow in Buddhist America” that describes a community with a sexually promiscuous Abbot who gave AIDS to at least one of his followers.

I am a woman who knows the dynamic and beautiful practice of Zazen. I also had a strong affinity for the natural surroundings of DBZ. I loved the lake, the Buddha across the lake, the Jizo on the hill, the trees growing out of cracks in the rocks, the rain on the roof, and the color of everything. I became Tenzo and loved (most of the time) getting up before the sun to make oatmeal, start new batches of bread, and bring it all out to the tables to serve fellow students. I had wonderful help from the head monk. Most of what I learned about the practice of Zazen and the art of being Tenzo came from this monk. Although for obvious reasons I tended to keep myself apart from other residents, there are memories with Sangha students that I treasure. It was painful to leave all of that behind, as well as the possibilities that I imagined for the place as a whole. Unlike Eido Shimano, I was essentially banished from the monastery. In the aftermath of one of his own scandals, Eido Shimano has written that he “bravely marches on”. Marching on over the lives of women and men he has directly impeded, slandered or thrown aside – with the overall support of the board - is hardly a form of courage.

The practice of Zazen is not in question here. Japanese culture is not in question here. Lineage is not my concern here. What Eido Shimano did was wrong. What the board failed to do to not safeguard the practice for everyone was wrong. The often cited “again and again and again” of covering up or whitewashing the facts caused by Eido Shimano’s destructive actions was wrong. That time and energy could have been used to encourage focus and

creativity on a vibrant and life-giving practice that begins the moment we step off the cushion just as much as when we bow to it and begin sitting.

To this day, immense amounts of time and energy are consumed by this focus on Eido Shimano. That energy should belong mostly to supporting and guiding the healthy development of Zen students. Members who have withdrawn from the board of directors (some current members include; Banko Randy Phillips, Genjo Joe Marinello, Seigan Ed Glassing) large numbers of former ZSS students, and scores of Zen teachers have pointed out that Eido Shimano has caused inestimable harm to the Sangha, and to the future of Zen Studies Society. Students like me (and sometimes their families and friends) who were directly harmed have experienced immeasurable loss of potential, community, and even health.

Until Eido Shimano is asked to leave without visitation privileges, or until he has expressed genuine empathy and remorse – rather than shame at being exposed - to a substantial number of students, ordained monks and nuns, and heirs; a voting membership becomes a reality; and plans for restitution to injured parties in a restorative justice program are in place, students will continue to have to replay the wheel of sorting out what Zen Studies Society has yet to accomplish despite the leadership's long-standing responsibility to act.

The word "victim" indicates real injury, but not a real identity. My identity comes from something that is irrepressible and unsullied. It opens unexpectedly, such as on a walk by the ocean or sharing time with a beloved while both are free of agendas. This is what causes me to feel awe and joy. Whatever that aliveness is that can re-emerge as constant and true despite what many of us have been through is what I bow to, and I bow to it in you.

In a recent online Dharma talk given by Norman Fischer called "When You Greet Me, I Bow", he eloquently summarizes the relational space between a Zen teacher of old and his student ... *" simply being together with warm-hearted kindness, dropping storylines, and appreciating each other's profound human presence is the whole of teaching."*

If it is trust in this grace and life-affirming power of the Dharma that you wish to wholeheartedly uphold, rather than the flounderings of an institution, and you believe Eido Shimano has important work to do to recognize and make amends for his past harmful actions, then I truly believe that such a refuge will naturally unfold toward the benefit of all.

Olivia

(This pseudonym is for privacy to allow my own life to unfold without further trauma from either Eido Shimano or Zen Studies Society. It is not secrecy. At some point I may be willing to use my real name but until then I ask that you respect my anonymity. Relevant people know who I am. Some of my present activities include being clerk for a Committee on Peace and Social Concerns within the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting - Quaker)