

Sept. 5, 2011

Dear Shinge Roshi,

I know that, since I've not been a member of ZSS, I may not be completely qualified to offer my observations on the crisis faced by the organization now, but as a member of the Ethics Committee, I was invited to Olive Branch meetings, so I had the chance to see first-hand the anger, sadness and confusion which Eido Roshi's behavior has produced. I am also a long-time Zen student, training primarily with Kyudo Roshi, the third of Soen Roshi's successors and, until his death three years ago, Abbot at Ryutakuji, where I and others of his New York students often did sesshin and residencies. It seems to me that Kyudo's connection with Soen makes Dai Bosatsu part of my own lineage, so I can't look at the crisis with complete detachment. Finally, my work as a writer has often centered on Zen, producing, among other things, a cover article for THE NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE on Dai Bosatsu at the time of its opening and, more recently, the memoir, AMBIVALENT ZEN. For what they're worth then, here are my thoughts in the aftermath of the Olive Branch attempt at mediation.

I am as bewildered as anyone else by Eido Roshi, but it seems to me that, as Zen students, we must bring our practice to bear on our response to him. All of us know that our roots are in the Heart Sutra, the identity of Relative and Absolute, thus that we are obliged to challenge dualistic moral judgment and appreciate the distinction -- and lack of such -- between the realm in which cause and effect are one and the realm in which they're separate. On the other hand, we must not forget that the world we live in is every day, thanks to media, pop-psychology and the righteous fury of political correctness, more addicted to such dualism and the simplistic moralism it produces. It is obvious to us all, I think, that our practice requires us to find a Middle Way which avoids such moralism without denying that Eido's behavior has had concrete effect in the relative world. One doesn't have to forgive his malfeasance to acknowledge that Shoboji, DBZ and the Zen Studies Society in general owe their existence to his realization, and one doesn't deny that realization by holding him accountable for the repercussions of his behavior. If he's failed us as a human being, he's not the first master whose realization did not carry over into the Relative Realm, and if we continue to revere him, we are not the first students to benefit from an imperfect teacher. In effect, we are required to judge him and not-judge him simultaneously, practice with our response to him as we practice with our koans on and off our cushions.

In addition to this particular koan, ZSS has to face two concrete realities. First, while many students want to see Eido barred from teaching altogether, some want to continue their work with him and resent those who would prevent their doing so. It seems to me that ZSS owes it to these students to make possible continuation of their practice in any framework they choose. Second, the society faces daunting financial and legal issues produced not only by this crisis and the legal threat it has generated but the enormous amount of property it owns. I don't underestimate

these challenges but I see one way to deal with them. Traumatic though it would be, ZSS could challenge Eido Roshi and his supporters to raise the money to buy Shoboji. If he could do so, the tangible benefits of this transaction would be huge. Those who remain devoted to him would have a chance to continue their studies, and those who can't forgive him would not have to cross paths with him or them. Hopefully, the anger and conflict between these two groups would be defused. If Eido crosses lines he's crossed in the past, he alone would pay the price for doing so, and anyone who studies with him, knowing of his past, would have to take responsibility for any interaction that occurs. Finally, the ZSS would not only acknowledge its debt to Eido and restore this controversy to the Zen perspective from which it needs to be seen but see itself financially stabilized and, downsized from the unmanageable amount of property it owns, secure in its capacity to support DBZ.

Respecting his realization as I do, I can't believe that anything I've said above has not occurred to Eido Roshi himself. If so, the hope would be that the combination of this humbling, painful experience and the opportunity to resume teaching in an independent framework would enable him, at last, to acknowledge the choices he's made and offer concrete, honest teachings on their causes and effects. Since sexual issues like those he's created are close to epidemic among those with power in our culture (see Bill Clinton, Eliot Spitzer, numerous Catholic priests, and spiritual teachers like Maezumi Roshi, Chogyam Trungpa, Baker Roshi, Gempo Merzel, and many others), the insights produced by these teachings might be profound and valuable beyond any we can imagine. I can't speak for anyone else of course but I know that, while I've not been Eido Roshi's student, I'd make every effort to study with him at this juncture of his life.

I know there are those who will be enraged at this proposal but to me it seems inarguable.

Respectfully/Lawrence Shainberg