



True Dharma Eye: Enlightenment versus Social Misconduct

Tags: Eido Shimano, Keido Fukushima, Myoan Grace Schireson

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I have been contemplating Fukushima Roshi's teaching to me about the Zen word freedom or "jiyu" in Japanese. This teaching is most relevant to the misconduct that has been justified as the privilege of a Zen teacher's enlightenment. Fukushima Roshi, who had studied in America and spoke English well, stated that the most obvious problem with the use of the word "jiyu" or Zen freedom, is that Westerners associate freedom with freedom from (oppression, cultural conventions, taxation without representation etc), but the Japanese meaning of the word is not freedom FROM, but freedom TO. Jiyu or Zen freedom is freedom to take the entire universe and its needs as oneself; freedom to hold another's well being as your responsibility; freedom to express Zen in a way that respects Dharma and upholds Western values and laws. Jiyu does not mean that a Zen Master, living and relying on Mushin, is free from consequences or ethical norms when using others to satisfy his whims; nor is he free from causing harm when he believes that he has been freed "from" the laws and values of the society in which he lives. I see this fundamental misunderstanding of enlightenment being enacted by self-centered Zen teachers quoting the Japanese "jiyu" or "Zen freedom" based on Enlightened understanding as "freedom from."

Fukushima Roshi taught me that the literal translation of "Zen freedom" is based on living with the mind of mu (or no separate self) and it means "self-reliance". Ji=self, yu= reliance.

Fukushima Roshi clarified that the self we rely on is based on the mu self or becoming "mu," and living one's life from the perspective of mushin. Mushin is living in the realm of understanding how the universal self expresses itself through and with us. Fukushima Roshi also said that Western thought interpreted "freedom" as freedom "from" oppression and unfair laws. But it must be made clear, he said, that jiyu means "freedom to." This is a life that is "freedom to" bring creativity, love, wholeness and support "to" everything we encounter. We are not separate from those we meet by some fictitious license of Zen enlightenment.

Our task is how we bring Zen "to" help them people even under the most difficult and confusing circumstances? This is the freedom "to" creatively connect with our life. Zen Freedom, jiyu, is not at all like freedom "from" following rules and laws in order to get away from the consequences of satisfying one's own personal desires or ambitions. Jiyu, Zen freedom, is the responsibility "to" help bring healing to all life we encounter. Uchiyama Roshi, a Dharma friend of Fukushima Roshi, said it another way: "Everything you encounter is your life."

Currently we see several examples of Zen teachers who are confused and confusing their sanghas with this bogus "freedom from" Zen-- a Zen that eschews following the ethical rules that protect students. We hear of Eido Shimano, formerly Abbot of Zen Studies Society, being described as "living in the realm of the Absolute." The follow on foolish talk concludes that he cannot cause harm to others due to this so-called attainment. Teaching this mistaken, blatantly self-serving and dangerous idea reveals a teaching which has no stable understanding of what it means to be interconnected, to have no separate self. We must correct this mistaken teaching without condemning the ones who promote it. However, once we understand that someone is preaching false Dharma, it is our responsibility "to" not allow them to continue this harmful charade. This is our gift "to" them. We need to walk away, to vote with our feet, and if necessary, we are free "to" pursue legal options to stop their harm. We need to take our wallets with us and not support any further perversion of Zen understanding Zen which can only result in greater harm to individuals and to Dharma.

The relative world is not put on hold when we manifest Awakening or vividly experience the Absolute. There is proof that this is true; even Eido Shimano will die in this relative realm. There is not a speck of separation between the realm of the relative and the Absolute. We are relative beings existing in both realms simultaneously, we answer "to" the understandings of both realms simultaneously, and we are connected "to" all beings in these realms simultaneously. We are responsible "to" expressing our relationship to both realms at all times.

If we harm other people, deceive other people, denounce other people we are responsible to all of them. We have not gained through Zen freedom any "freedom from" harming others or the consequences of harming others. Zen freedom is not a free pass that liberates us from our karma. Far from it! We become all the more responsible to not causing harm, so be impeccably careful with your Zen freedom!

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