

Ven. Eido Shimano responds to a letter issued by the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society on January 31st, 2013.

## **Letter to the Sangha From Eido Shimano**

Dear Sangha and Dharma Friends,

It was with a heavy heart that I read the letter circulated to you by the current Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society on January 31st, 2013. It contained so many distortions, inaccuracies and outright falsehoods that I could not simply let it pass without comment. However, I have no intention of honoring the scurrilous ad hominem attacks against me personally with specific responses.

When I became the leader of the Zen Studies Society, it had one member and no assets. With the support of my wife Aiho and members of the Sangha, I was able to grow the ZSS to the point where, by my retirement, it had become perhaps the pre-eminent center of Zen Buddhist practice and education in the United States. Not only did we establish the New York Zendo, now a beautiful and spiritual center of study in the middle of Manhattan, but we also established Dai Bosatsu Zendo, a monastery in the Catskills Mountains of New York State as a retreat for the members of the ZSS Sangha to do retreats. Both have become nationally renowned centers of Zen study and practice.

When I was Abbott, we had no big trouble raising sufficient funds to support these two facilities and also to meet the operating needs of the ZSS. According to the letter sent by ZSS, this is no longer the case. Responsibility for this can only be laid at the feet of the current directors, who apparently are not willing to put forth the time, dedication and ability necessary to make successful fund-raising efforts.

In 1995, the ZSS Board of Directors entered into Deferred Compensation Agreements, essentially pensions, with me and my wife, in recognition of our years of achievement and service. The allegations being made regarding my alleged behavior were known then, and yet the ZSS Board, an independent entity, agreed to the Deferred Compensation Agreements. During our time receiving salaries from the ZSS, my wife and I accepted far less than we could have earned in other fields of endeavor. This was because of our dedication to the Dharma, and the fact that neither of us is motivated by the need for wealth. Had we been so, we could have achieved it through a career of lecturing, writing, and doing other things consistent with placing our own needs before that of the ZSS. The Deferred Compensation Agreements reflect the same principles, and are more modest, quite frankly, than other arrangements made on behalf of similarly situated individuals.

Now the society has, pleading poverty, unilaterally ignored the agreements freely and legally entered into. Several lawyers have, on my behalf, tried to settle this amicably for over two years with the ZSS Board, to no avail. We did not wish to bring a lawsuit, which we made clear to the ZSS Board in a pre-lawsuit letter. The ZSS Board however, instead of negotiating in good faith, began a campaign of personal vilification, knowing that these matters had nothing to do with their economic decision to breach the agreements. When the ZSS Board then acted to cease all payments to us of our retirement compensation after August, 2012, we had no other recourse.

Due to this behavior and their violation of the covenant, we had no option but to sue the ZSS Board in the civil courts.

While this was not our desire, there is nothing in Buddhist principles that states that a revered elder leader must simply accept the illegal actions of those he has trained and who do him dishonor by their actions.

If the ZSS Board wants to put an end to this lawsuit, they need only to meet their legal obligations. If they can honor the Deferred Compensation Agreement, then they can not only be able to meet their legal obligations, but they will be able to continue to maintain the ZSS an important national resource it became under my stewardship.

I trust from the bottom of my heart that both the ZSS Board and myself with Aiho have one common wish: "Let true Dharma continue, universal Sangha relations become complete."

Gassho

Eido Shimano  
February 13th, 2013