

From: "Stuart Lachs" <slachs@att.net>
Subject: **Re: Aitken letter of Sept. 7, 2006**
Date: March 1, 2011 4:54:53 PM EST
To: "Kobutsu Malone" <kobutsu@engaged-zen.org>

On March 1, 2011, at 3:41 PM, Stuart Lachs wrote:

Kobutsu,

Here is the email Aitken wrote me in reply to my questions. It is dated September 7, 2006. In a follow up email (Sept. 13, 2006) to some of my questions he mentioned there were some mistakes in the DBZ opening ceremony paragraph, so not to quote from that. He wrote:

I shared my prior letter with a few confidants here, and they point out a couple of small errors concerning the Dai Bosatsu opening in 1976. These mistakes don't affect the substance of what I reported, Please don't quote from that paragraph directly.

----- Original Message -----

From: [Robert Aitken](#)
To: [Stuart Lachs](#)
Sent: Thursday, September 07, 2006 3:59 PM
Subject: rba The Story

Dear Stuart:

I want to help make your AAR presentation factual, and thus I am moved to recall the Shimano story as accurately as I can. I am living in a care home in Honolulu, at 89 pretty much wheel chair bound. My memory of circumstances is clear, though my memory of names is not. I have dictated what follows to my secretary Carolyn Glass:

In 1958, Anne and I visited Ryutakuji. It was her second visit. In the course of a reunion with Soen Roshi and my other old friends there, we met Eido Tai Shimono. He introduced himself and said that he wanted to migrate to the U.S. and like Senzaki Sensei, leave his bones in the United States, and he asked for our help. We were impressed with him and promised to do what we could. To make a long story short, we were able to bring him to Hawai'i in the summer of 1960.

He lived with us at the first KoKo An zendo, occupying the front bedroom while Anne and I used a back bedroom. We had started the Diamond Sangha with Soen Roshi's approval in the fall of 1959. He was introduced to our little group as our new leader. From the beginning, he took a very confrontational position and the little group was soon divided into partisans of the new leader and those who maintained their loyalty to me. Needless to say, things were very difficult. We persevered however, and sent him to the University of Hawai'i for (I think it was) a semester of English language and literature. He made many changes in our procedures and cultivated his little subgroup.

We moved our zendo to a better location and brought Soen Roshi over for sesshin. I shared my disappointed feelings about Tai San with the Roshi and while he seemed to sympathize, nothing changed. We persevered and after a couple of years, two members had nervous breakdowns within a couple weeks of each other. I was alarmed and consulted the psychiatrist who was Director of Mental Health Training at the Queen's Medical Center. He suggested that I volunteer at the mental health ward of the Medical Center and promised that I would sit in on staff meetings. I followed this arrangement and found it to be very instructive and I told Tai San about it and suggested that he come with me. He assented and we did a couple of sessions together.

Very soon, however, the Director of Mental Health Training who had set up the arrangement for me called me aside and said that the head nurse on the ward had made the connection between her new volunteer (Tai San) and the fellow who seemed to be at the center of the cases of the two women who had suffered nervous breakdowns. She got the idea that he was volunteering in order to find a way to prey on other women. I was stunned but followed through with an investigation and found that indeed Tai San was involved. I gathered evidence until I was sure and then flew to Japan to consult with Soen Roshi. (I told Tai San that I was going to the Mainland to see my parents.)

Soen Roshi listened to me carefully but I sensed that he did not take the news very seriously. Yasutani Roshi was at that time on vacation nearby, and we went together to consult with him also. He was even less concerned about the news, and in fact suggested that Tai San not go to that hospital anymore. I came back to Honolulu without really achieving anything to find that Tai San had heard about my consultations. He made a big thing about how I had deceived him and told him that I would be visiting my parents. He was scheduled to leave for New York in a few days.

Off he went and soon I began hearing from my Zen friends in New York, “What’s going on?” Apparently he just descended upon them. At this point, Anne entered the fray by urging me to keep entirely quiet about the whole matter, in order to protect the women who had suffered from his depredations. She was really firm about this, while I wanted to go to INS with my papers as evidence and urge Tai San’s deportation. Anne was very vehement in her opposition to this notion, so I compromised by telling my story briefly to two of the New York friends. By this time, they were reconciled to his being there and were helping him. He was planning to bring a bride from Japan and they were set to welcome her. They felt that her presence and her relationship with Tai San would put everything right.

Shortly before Anne died 12 years ago, she confided that she regretted advising me to lay off, and thus protect the two women. Now your plan to tell the story to the AAR has come up, and I feel that she would approve my relating the story to you. One of the women moved to Los Angeles and we corresponded for a while. I don’t know even whether or not she is still alive. The other woman never recovered from her breakdown and has lived in a halfway house here on O’ahu all these years. Maybe she too is no longer living. So I feel comfortable about telling the story now.

Meantime Tai San did his thing in New York. We began to hear stories of his sexual adventures very soon, despite his marriage. I attended the opening of the Daibosatsu zendo in 1976, mainly to see my old friends from Ryutakuji who were planning to attend also.

I shared my prior letter with a few confidants here, and they point out a couple of small errors concerning the Dai Bosatsu opening in 1976. These mistakes don't affect the substance of what I reported, Please don't quote from that paragraph directly.

One of my earliest students with whom I did zazen under Yamada Roshi in Japan, settled in New York to be near her aging father. She became a member at Daibosatsu and at the New York zendo and quickly became Tai San’s mistress. She reported his methods in some detail—apparently by this time he was quite a lothario, and she refused to join in my condemnation of his “teaching”.

We see Tai San's students from time to time—at present one of our members held a leadership role at the New York center. He is doing well in his practice, which he had to start over. I wish that all of Tai San's former students should do as well.

I did not during the course of the confrontation with Tai San think about the possibility that I was endangering my practice. Soen Roshi and Yasutani Roshi likewise never brought it up. The idea did occur to me after things were settled down, but I did not cultivate it.

There's a lot more to tell, let me respond to any questions you might have.

Robert Aitken