

August 5, 2011

Dear Zen Studies Society --

On Aug. 4, 2011, a letter was sent to sangha members and those concerned about Zen Studies Society and its proprietor, Eido Shimano. The letter invited them to a meeting at Dai Bosatsu Zendo to speak out and be 'healed.' While the setting and the format do not convince me that the Aug. 26-28 meeting will provide much more than yet another defensive and self-serving arena in which to make nice and sweep the difficulties under the carpet, still it is hard not to hope -- to applaud those who have worked so hard, been so confused, felt so apprehensive or outraged about the past and future ... who squirmed and wriggled and mustered what courage they could in a daunting situation. Thank you for what courage you managed to muster. And thank you to the extent you are capable of extending that courage into the future: For too long, too many have relied on cowardice.

The truth is, I would like to say something to that group. I would like to say something and yet do not trust that I could be coherent based on the long and convoluted history that needs to be honestly addressed if Zen Studies Society is to live something other than a hobbled and misshapen life. I will not be able to take part in the meeting, not least because I am old and try to steer clear of events for which I simply do not have the energy. So I will try to say something on the page ... that way I can get up and go to the bathroom when I need to. I am not promising to be any more coherent than I might be in person, but at least I won't be nodding off or pissing in my pants.

First, my disclaimer:

I am fortunate (some may say unfortunate) enough in the given circumstances, to belong to no established Zen institution. My reputation and income and food and clothing are not dependant on making nice when things are palpably not nice. I am not afraid to lose my job or have my livelihood diminished. I love and owe a debt to Zen practice and acknowledge that openly. But I respectfully decline to be shackled -- to be bamboozled by idiot talk of an "unconditioned realm" which turns a truly blinded eye to what is by its very nature conditioned. I will not support or suborn sweet talk and other perjury. Eido Shimano was my first Zen 'teacher.' Later, I was fortunate to find a Zen teacher in Kyudo Nakagawa Roshi. Mr. Shimano taught me a lot. I am grateful for that teaching, but I would not, after 40 years of practice, wish that teaching on my worst enemy. And I do not agree with those who maintain that Shimano's shame does not touch and sully the entirety of whatever 'Zen in America' might be. His activities -- and the unwillingness to admit them openly -- have been appalling and deserve to be acknowledged and addressed as such. His lineage, to the extent that he has any, has been sullied and demeaned ... and with it, every other lineage. This is not just hyperbole.

For those who are not familiar with Eido Shimano's 50-plus-year life in the United States, I strongly suggest that they acquaint themselves with the the Shimanoarchive on the

internet. It is there, in document after document, that whatever good Mr. Shimano may have accomplished is given some perspective. Over and over and over again, Mr. Shimano was given the opportunity to act the part of a true man, to admit his missteps and malfeasances, and to seek forgiveness. Over and over and over again, he disdained the opportunities offered by the very people who fed and clothed and often loved him. Instead, he chose to maneuver and manipulate and lie outright. Never was it a specific wounded individual to whom he admitted his missteps and sought forgiveness. Always there was reference to "this matter" or some other vague, face-saving device, a device that his supporters often bought into and supported and encouraged ... and with which they sullied themselves in hopes that, really, things weren't all that bad and those who questioned Mr. Shimano were vindictive enemies or revenge-seekers and ... well, it's nice to make nice; let's do nice Zen, compassionate Zen, profound Zen, unified and unifying Zen ... phony-baloney Zen, smiley-faced Zen, corrupt and corrupting and 'authentic' Zen... the kind of Zen that may punch endless ladder-climbing tickets but skirts what was and is in front of our noses.

In the past, Mr. Shimano has addressed the various eruptions and sorrows with a well-walled contrition. This "matter" was deeply troubling to him, he said. And on more than one occasion he also asserted that his sexual predations were "none of your (sangha's) business." None of my business?! The very brothers and sisters who supported and comforted and encouraged my practice in the deepest possible ways were wounded and it was "none of your business?!" Well, divide and conquer may be an acceptable tactic among the power- and money-hungry, but it is not acceptable in any sangha I want to be part of. Put bluntly, the suggestion that it's "none of your business" is obscene.

To its detractors, I will concede this point: The shimanoarchive and other evidentiary locations are largely circumstantial in nature. There is no smoking gun, no photo of Mr. Shimano with his hand in the metaphorical cookie jar. But 1. the circumstantial evidence is too overwhelming for any sane person to overlook or dismiss and 2. perhaps the FBI will be able to sort out and legally nail down the fiduciary and sexual predations that Mr. Shimano -- and by extension Zen Studies Society -- has been party to through the decades.

Beyond the "Fuck Follies" to which I was a partial witness in the 1970's and 1980's -- follies that disrupted the sangha in ways traditionally frowned upon in Buddhist practice - - there lies the simple question of integrity and trust, two pretty amorphous qualities that lie at the foundation of a spiritually-oriented organization. Mr. Shimano's activities have proved over and over again that he was willing to breach and abuse and manipulate that trust. He has been a true man with a lot of rank. Failure to admit this, in all its inglorious splendor, is a failure to move to more fruitful ground. Admitting that blue sky is blue is important on an actualized and beautiful day.

From the beginning of the latest round of accusation and counter-accusation, offense and defense, debate and analysis, I have had only two hopes:

1. That Mr. Shimano would be cut off cleanly and completely from any access to or participation in whatever Zen Studies Society might hope to be. No more maybe's, no

more just-but's, no more wishy-washy evasions. No more self-serving equivocations. Cut ... off ... cleanly ... and... completely. Mr. Shimano has proven himself worthy of this action -- an action advocated by the Faith Trust Institute among others. "No!" means no ... end of discussion. If the Americans Mr. Shimano was so willing to disdain as barbarians over the decades are too much for him to stomach, perhaps he will find a more civilized culture in which to elevate his sparkling self-image in Japan.

2. That Zen Studies Society would find a way to apologize specifically to the individuals who were, and in some cases continue to be, ravaged by Mr. Shimano's activities. This apology would, by its nature, include the specific, in-person admission that past and perhaps present boards of directors had been complicit in denying, lying about, camouflaging or papering over those activities. Everyone would like to save face or find 'reasons' for why they did what they did. But how can anyone save face without admitting to the face they have, through their actions, proved they already have?

Finally, I would hope that whatever, if any, Zen Studies Society emerges in the future will take into account that this whole discussion has little or nothing to do with philosophy or religion. It has everything to do with living, breathing human beings -- what Buddhists like to call sentient beings. To suggest that those human beings are precious is a bit precious, but under the circumstances, perhaps it needs to be said. To the extent that those human beings have joined in a sangha effort, they ARE the treasure that is called sangha. Individually. Personally. Profoundly ... THE treasure. The barbarians are the treasure. To squander or disdain or overlook that treasure -- individually, personally -- is a core mistake.

The good thing about mistakes is that we are all in a position not to repeat them.

adam fisher