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Letter to Shinge Roshi

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by [Genjo](#) on Mon Nov 07, 2011 9:22 pm

What follows is my letter to my Dharma Sister, Shinge Roshi, concerning her November 1st letter to the ZSS Sangha...

11/7/11

Dear Shinge Roshi,

I hope you had a wonderful Harvest Sesshin at Dai Bosatsu (DBZ). I deeply respect your dedication to the Dharma and the efforts you are putting forth to nurture Zen practice at Hoen-Ji (Syracuse), Shobo-Ji (NYC) and Kongo-Ji (DBZ). I have read and re-read your letter to the Zen Studies Society Sangha dated November 1st < <http://www.shimanoarchive.com/PDFs/2011...Sangha.pdf> >, and though I see some movement to close this matter of Eido Roshi's multiple ethical breaches over decades, I still find more absent than present in your actions to date.

For example, in your letter you say you "cannot apologize for what others have done or have not done", but on this point, I strongly disagree. The United States apologized long after it should have for the internment of Japanese Americans during WWII, but the apology was greatly appreciated by those internees still living and their decedents. As abbot of the Zen Studies Society (ZSS) I think it is your responsibility to see that the organization as a whole apologizes for its part in minimizing Eido Roshi's earlier ethical breaches and thereby inadequately protecting the sangha. The organization also failed Eido Roshi by never insisting on any conditions that might have helped him address his obvious addiction. Please don't hide behind legal arguments that such an admission would put the organization at financial risk; a far greater risk, as the Faith Trust Institute has told us, is further alienating both victims and the wider public by not forthrightly admitting the organizational contribution to this serial problem.

Your letter also reports that you have revised the ZSS bylaws and affirm that there will be "elected representatives from both the New York Zendo and Dai Bosatsu Zendo." In addition, you say that you have nominated others to be on the board with "strong non-profit, law, and business careers." I applaud the democratic reforms and your pledge for transparency, but as far as I can tell the new bylaws have not been released to the public, there has been no mention of when or how elections will be held, how membership will be determined for who can vote, how large the board will be, or who you have nominated to serve on the board. Frankly, without this information everyone is left in the dark and these steps can hardly be lauded as transparent.

In addition, from what I understand, only one person from each of the two ZSS properties will be elected to the board. This will certainly not constitute a majority, not even a significant minority, hardly the progress many have been waiting for to assure that the ZSS Board be independent of the authority of the Abbot. I know some Zen Centers still have non-profit boards that are not substantially elected by the sangha, but if there was ever a more convincing case of the organizational dangers that are inherent in this model than ZSS, I'm not aware of it. Moreover, it is my understanding that the new bylaws still give the abbot a vote on the board and refer to abbot as the Chief Executive Officer. I know many were hoping for some real signs of separation of secular and spiritual powers in the new bylaws, but this appears to be missing. I understand that this kind of language and organization may work for smaller Zen groups, but given the history of ZSS and the real needs of a larger organization, the abbot should be in charge of practice, and the Board should be in charge of finances and management.

You also announce in your letter that you "will arrange a Board training retreat with a non-profit professional on the best practices for governance and communication." This is all fine and good, but there is no mention of any commitment to directly address the needs of those most impacted by Eido Roshi's ethical breaches. At the very least some kind of trust fund should be set up to help those psychologically damaged by Eido Roshi's deplorable behavior. In addition, there most definitely needs to be some kind of commitment to further sangha wide meetings where, as recommended by the Olive Branch facilitators, work can be done to educate and train the community in how to recognize and help prevent future abuses of power and authority. Furthermore, there is no mention of efforts to proactively open our arms to our Dharma brothers and sisters alienated from our practice over the decades.

Also noticeably absent from your letter is any mention of any restrictions placed on Eido Roshi. It is my understanding that he still has rooms dedicated to his use on both ZSS properties. I know his teaching has been curtailed and that he is only allowed to visit infrequently and under supervision, but as far as I can see there has been no public codification of these restrictions by the ZSS board. For the Sangha's protection and Eido Roshi's protection the scope and degree of restrictions must be made public. Of course you know my opinion, the simplest and most direct solution that would offer the best chance of healing of the fractured ZSS Sangha, would be to insist on an indefinite hiatus from Eido Roshi's presence on campus. Most ministers who have retired from congregations without controversy volunteer to stay away for a year or more to allow the new minister to become adequately established. Eido Roshi resigned as abbot almost a year ago, for what reason does he still need to have rooms dedicated to his use on both properties? I hear there is still a huge picture of Eido Roshi hanging up in Shobo-Ji. Eido Roshi has proven himself to be a serial predator who has as yet only minimally understood the damage he has done to so many and has no concept of how much he has damaged American Zen. It is an affront to those he has harmed and the wider Maha Sangha that he is still so coddled by you.

Unfortunately, what is missing from your letter far exceeds what is present in your letter. I was hoping to feel sufficiently accepting of your positive steps to feel comfortable attending this year's Rohatsu sesshin at DBZ, but regrettably I do not feel in sufficient communion with the reforms you have made to date. I feel such disappointment and disillusionment at the moment that I'm not sure when or if I will be able to train there again. It is such a shame to see this precious opportunity to really turn this organization around slipping away. Please stop favoring the man over the Dharma. I fear that just as others who have given so much to ZSS and the Dharma, I too will become one those who are alienated and forgotten.

May the Dharma and traditional Rinzaï practice flourish at ZSS,

Genjo

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