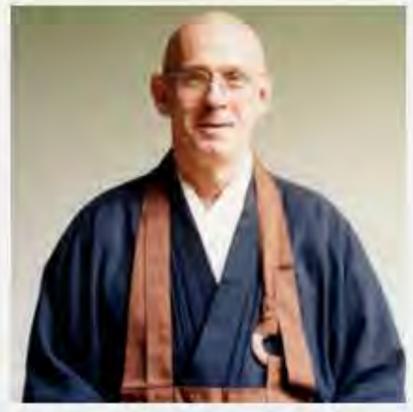


EIDO SHIMANO NAMES NEW DHARMA SUCCESSOR WITH FALLOUT AT AZTA

Posted by: Adam Kō Shin Tebbe December 13, 2013

Eido Tai Shimano, the former Abbot of Zen Studies Society who retired amid sexual scandal, is continuing to teach in the United States and overseas. This past November, at a location referred to as “hidden” Zendo, Shimano held sesshin and gave dharma transmission to Zenrin R. Lewis of The Jacksonville Zen Sangha in Florida (also performing one jukai ceremony during the retreat).



Zenrin R. Lewis

The move caused a ruckus of sorts over at the American Zen Teachers Association (AZTA) after, resulting in Genjo Marinello removing Zenrin's temple from their list of centers. On the removal, Genjo Osho stated (in a leaked email from the AZTA):

“ *Eido Shimano agrees that a Zen teacher should not be sexual with students; however, this has never stopped him from being a pathological liar and sexual predator of his own sangha. Zenrin accepts that Eido Shimano has done the best he can and supports his continued teaching and actively continues to train with him.*

I don't care if Zenrin is a member of AZTA or not, we have no way to say if a member is in good standing or not. Nevertheless, I am in charge making additions and changes to the AZTA database, and I will not tolerate any longer the use of our database to refer people to a teacher and organization that continues to train with Eido Shimano. So hearing no objection I have deleted his listing from our public database.

If there is a vote to return him to our database, I will not implement it; however, I will resign from this organization and someone else may then restore it.

Genjo's announcement prompted the following response by Rev. Nonin Chowaney of the Nebraska Zen Center:

“ *This is unacceptable conduct. Genjo was not given the power to delete members from our list, so he has self-righteously overstepped his bounds. Can someone agree to take over our database, and if Genjo resigns from AZTA, that would be fine with me.*

One could sympathize with the position held by both men in this exchange, one worried about sending people to a center so closely affiliated with Shimano (who the late Robert Aitken once referred to as “a crook”) and the other concerned about standing AZTA members having their listing removed without a formal process.

The case raises an interesting dilemma for the AZTA. The association presents itself on its website as a peer group, providing “an opportunity for expanded peer contacts and exchanges.” There is a membership committee in place for admitting individuals in to its membership, but there appears to be no mechanism in place for one's removal — this due to the nature of the association itself (considering applicants based on their credentials alone). This results in what appears to be a lifetime membership. In all fairness, that process is under consideration (a process for grounds for removal).

At best, in this respect, when one sees that a Zen teacher is a member of the AZTA on their respective websites, it means that they have been recognized by their peers as another Zen teacher based on their credentials. Nothing more, nothing less. The membership appears unconcerned with matters of ethical breaches (as a body), with questions for prospective applicants revolving around matters of authorizations, length of time teaching, and length of time training. There are no questions regarding ethical issues, as there is no ethical statement on behalf of the AZTA itself.

As always, I'm afraid, it is “buyer beware” when entering the practice in a North American Zen center. Based on comments that have come in here at the website and elsewhere on the web, there are some individuals out there wholly willing to continue their practice with someone lax in their ethical judgment (Shimano being a more pronounced example of this).

As of today, there are no standardized ethical guidelines for American Zen teachers. Some centers have their own guidelines, with some being stronger than others. Burden therefore rests on the backs of those entering the practice to gauge the conduct of a prospective teacher. While taking responsibility for ourselves in this fashion is a good thing, and while we should be doing this with or without ethical guidelines or oversight in place, it is disconcerting that we ask those entering the practice, often at very difficult points in their own life, to be in a place where they are even interested in asking these very important questions.

We also have a situation here where individuals who might find more appropriate help in a mental health setting come knocking at the door of a center, instead. In some of these ethical breaches like that involving Shimano, it is alleged, these same people were those most vulnerable to his advances.

There are folks from both camps in this conversation regarding more standardized ethics for Zen teachers — those in favor, and those opposed, concerned that oversight would be heavy-handed. In my opinion, since there is this divide, the question for all of these practitioners might be, “Which option would result in the least harm?”