

## SOME THOUGHTS ON ABANDONING DESTRUCTIVE DHARMAS

As a longtime student of the Dharma and one who cares deeply about the Buddha and his teaching, I am writing to share some of my thoughts on how to find our way back to the pure, original path to liberation he laid out for us.

It seems to me that as long as we allow ourselves to give equal weight to all voices, no matter what the level of spiritual attainment, and accept all the contradictory ways in which someone can consider themselves to be Buddhists, we will have confusion and harm.

By not delving deeply into what the Buddha actually taught, in his own words, and by tolerating destructive interpretations and schisms within the community, we now have uninstructed reporters telling us their version of Buddhism gleaned from what they see and hear around them. We have idle speculation and pernicious views of the basest sort sent out to the world, such as "the Buddha probably had lovers," tarnishing the reputation of Buddhism in large part because of the false, misguided teachers we have empowered over time.

The Buddha tells us unequivocally that if you cannot find a fully realized teacher, then follow the teachings. He further states that even well intentioned teachers who have not fully completed the path can cause great harm for a long time.

If we return to the earliest record of the teachings of the Buddha that have come down to us, (found in the Pāli), we find the outline to the path is revealed in detail, absolutely unambiguously. It is a major undertaking to study this since the Sutta Piṭaka is transcribed from the oral tradition prevalent in the Buddha's time. It contains the core doctrines of the Buddha in his own words and is thousands of pages long partly because of the endless repetitions, but partly because the Buddha was very thorough in making sure his teachings were clear. He said to investigate for ourselves the truth of his insights. It requires genuine practice if one hopes to go beyond a merely superficial grasp. Without at least an opening experience into the Dharma, it is very difficult to understand the Buddha's Way, nevertheless, he takes us from the simple awakening of faith in hearing the truth all the way through arduous practice to the place where nothing more needs to be done.

A fundamental principle of the canon is that the Buddha, Dharma, and Saṅgha all need to be pure and work together as a whole to reach the highest potential for beings.

I have studied the texts intensively and in them the Buddha comes across as extraordinarily wise, serene, compassionate and peaceful, both through his own careful words and impeccable demeanor as well as through his disciples' honoring reverence of him. There is a pervasive sense of gentle calm, and absolute nonviolence even when confronting the most difficult people and circumstances. I have not found one instance in which he was less than perfectly pure, or where there was any dissonance between what he said and what he did.

The Buddha put forth strict precepts and injunctions because they are intrinsic to the fulfillment of the path. The fact that these guidelines for conduct have been watered down or done away with over time has much to do with the dissension and confusion we have faced in the practice.

Reading the original, direct teachings, we find there is nothing murky or equivocal in the essential message. And the deeper one goes into the practice, the more one finds confirmable truth in every stage of realization he outlined.

It is only after the first major schism and the rise of sectarianism a century or so after the Buddha's passing that significant distortions in the canon emerged. These later teachings which ended up in China and Japan have some aspects in common with those of the Pāli, but diverge in many important respects. This seems to be how we met with Eido Shimano. Many put the sole blame on him, but through inference, we can see that somewhere before him things were already broken. How else would someone misguided to this extreme have been placed in a position of power?

To insure the purity and non-decline of the true Dharma, the Buddha said that only arahants (those truly enlightened and by definition incapable of doing harm) were permitted to go forth and teach in his name. "Fully enlightened" in the Buddha's Dispensation means that one has "fully penetrated and fully understood" the Four Noble Truths, which involves living the Noble Eightfold Path to its completion. Without right view and perfect virtue, "right concentration" leading to "right wisdom and right liberation" is "impossible". He also makes clear that even the higher states of emptiness are mundane and impermanent and not to be clung to. There has to be the absolute relinquishment of all craving and clinging down to the subtlest level. The final fruit is only attained once there is the destruction of all defilements (including craving/lust, existence, ignorance, aversion/hatred, even the subtlest sense of ego, etc.). It is only then that there is the cessation of suffering, the fulfillment of the spiritual life. Nirvāṇa.

Out of compassion, the Tathāgata created a strict order for his disciples, meant not only for their own welfare and non-harm, but for future generations as well. One cannot separate ethics from enlightenment, as many believe today. While the Buddha exhorts us to investigate his teachings for ourselves, when it comes to the precepts, there is only abiding by them. For this he asks us to trust in his far-reaching vision.

Looking to the Vinaya (the monastic code), the five most egregious offenses which the Buddha declared lead to almost immediate, severe karmic consequences and which inevitably continue beyond this life are: killing a Buddha, killing an arahant, patricide, matricide, and creating a schism.

The next layer of grave offenses are those of a sexual nature. Monks and nuns who engaged in it were summarily dismissed, without the possibility of rehabilitation in terms of returning to the Buddhist Order. This was an unwavering rule.



Perhaps we are too tolerant of bizarre contradictions in our longing and quest for enlightenment. While good translations of the whole canon have not been available until relatively recently, one could nevertheless form some kind of impression of the Buddha as being wise, compassionate, dignified in his demeanor and conduct and then look at the teacher we had in the present and note the differences. But even if we were able to have some level of discernment and not be thoroughly deceived, we had the problem of our own underlying tendencies not yet uprooted, and have been subject in many cases to master manipulators who took advantage of our weaknesses.

So in whatever way we have participated in the unfolding of Zen in America, whether through enmeshment with unscrupulous teachers, or lack of compassion for fellow members of the Saṅgha, or ill will, or any other way, being in proximity to false teachers is a potential cause for the "decline in wholesome states" which the Buddha warns is harmful to us. While we cannot change the past however much we may lament our errors, he tells us that through effort we can see through and abandon what is wrong. He reminds us that forgiveness within the Saṅgha is essential "for growth in the Dharma". We can practice lovingkindness (metta) right now for the benefit of all beings. He was not born a saint. He had to abandon ignorance through an intensive noble search himself before becoming the Fully Awakened Buddha.

In the Buddha's time and under his tutelage, the robes worn by monks and nuns stood for absolute integrity and sincere, ceaseless, mindful effort in higher training, largely in seclusion. There was no question of a monk or nun running a household, hanging out with lay people or even talking about things other than the Dharma. There was no living the "dusty" life in any measure whatsoever and they were required to be celibate. The Buddha said that engaging in sexual relations is "vulgar" and wrong view. It is directly antithetical to the Four Noble Truths which is at the heart of his teaching to overcome suffering. Even in his time there were those who said there can be sex without lust or attachment but the Tathāgata adamantly refuted this.

The Buddha was strict down to the most minor details with his monks and nuns, and ordination was meant as a lifelong commitment to seclusion, following the Pātimokkha (the rules and vows of the Saṅgha) and intense practice.

In contrast, ordination in Eido Shimano's regime came down to issuing a certificate of completion to monks and nuns after one thousand days. No matter what the level of their understanding or what kind of life they chose to lead afterwards, they were free to go off into the world as representatives of Buddhism with their robes and titles. Similar loose standards are rampant in other communities. No wonder the world is mystified as to what Buddhism actually is!

The Buddha was content with the humble robe he was wearing and a bowl. He wandered about "dwelling only in the Dharma." He exhorted monks and nuns to behave with impeccable dignity and correctness, as he himself did, both to "inspire others" and "to be worthy of alms." He enumerated the qualities that make one worthy of honor and reverence.

In a letter dated 9/3/14, Eido Shimano outlines his "perspective" after doing some "deep thinking". His practice of Zen extends over six decades yet in his stated viewpoint there is no evidence of going beyond an idea of the self and its worldly concerns. In the sutras we read that the Buddha was "content with little". In contrast, Eido Shimano is demanding millions of dollars. He finds it appropriate to add punitive damages.

Eido Shimano says "my concern is for the legacy and unclear future of the Zen Studies Society."

When someone who purports to be a teacher of the Dharma has a callous disregard for the welfare of others, deceives many, refuses to see and repent, cannot go beyond a sense of self, cannot be compassionate, cannot be generous, cannot let go—we have devastation and destruction. This is what he has unleashed on the world and cannot be undone. This is his legacy. The future is unclear in large part because of the choices he has made and continues to make. Even in this lawsuit, he not only wants fulfillment of a contract (drawn up under obvious undue influence and while acting as an unpurified, unrealized teacher) but is willing to destroy the Zen Studies Society through provoking its financial collapse. Does this reveal a noble, spiritually lofty mind; one without ill will; one who has completed the "higher training" of the Buddha; one who has fulfilled the goal of the holy life?

What is certain is that he has broken the unwritten contract he had with the Saṅgha to teach the true Dharma. Dai Bosatsu Zendo and Shobo-ji were built with the hard work, vision, idealism and spiritual hope of many. It would follow that the funds rightfully belong to the Saṅgha, who donated them for the GOOD OF ALL, not for the self-indulgence of one usurper.

Whatever the outcome of the lawsuit, Eido Shimano's karma is his alone. As is ours. We can abandon our faults as the Buddha suggests, turn to the true teachings and practice, and by our own efforts attain emancipation, without any further sense of loss.

We recently discovered that Eido Shimano is not on record as a legitimate lineage holder in Rinzai Zen. In addition to this, once we understand that Eido Shimano is not truly enlightened (based on our own sober reflection and reading what the Buddha actually taught) it doesn't take a great leap to question the legitimacy of the dharma successors. Holding on to this 'transmission' despite all the revelations detailed in the archive, and both heard and witnessed through the years, leaves them in a bizarre limbo. It seems an uncomfortably false position to be in not only to accept a misguided, illegitimate man's view that they are enlightened (!), but to derive their status and livelihood from that basis. The Zen Studies Society and the 'heirs' have been oddly silent on this matter.

Failing to adhere to the Buddha's teachings and precepts is tragic enough, but by not even respecting the austere monastic tradition and lineage of Rinzai Zen—what is left? Since the lineage breaks after Soen Roshi in terms of a legitimate transmission of Rinzai Zen to America, then what we actually have as the basis for the Zen Studies Society is Eido Shimano's self-originated sect: a wayward school of pseudo-Buddhism where various forms of narcissistic, sociopathic behaviors are tolerated so long as teachers are believed to have experienced some



level of emptiness (which could be very minor), pass koans, and exhibit enough personal power to deceive people.

Taking the current abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo as an example: despite knowing Eido Shimano's reputation first hand, Roko Shinge Sherry Chayat accepted the 'transmission' from him, and since then has fallen into the same murky territory he has inhabited for so long.

Here are some of Roko's statements regarding Eido Shimano:

"He is a remarkably astute, deep, profound, spiritually evolved, charismatic leader. But as we know, there can be these flaws."

"All of this has not made me less grateful to him as a profoundly realized teacher."

"... we believed in a manipulative sociopath who is anything but a true man without rank."

"When you yourself are so in the light, you may not see your shadow very well."

The Buddha said "I see nothing so blameworthy as wrong view." There are numerous misconceptions pervading what is presented to us as Buddhism which are detrimental to beings. Surely the concept of being at once "profoundly realized" and "a manipulative sociopath" is an absurd, deceptive, extremely pernicious misapprehension of Truth. Aside from being ignorant, it is a conveniently self-serving standpoint which enables people to excuse their own questionable behavior and allows unpurified teachers to stay in power. As we have seen, this fraudulent view has led countless followers astray for a very long time.

After all the lies and secrecy during Eido Shimano's tenure, there is a particular need for transparency and integrity in the leadership of the Zen Studies Society. Unfortunately this has not been the case under the new abbot. In the only conversation I ever had with Roko, sometime in the early 1990's at DBZ, she said to me, "I had an affair with Eido Roshi 18 years ago". She did not tell me this in confidence, but simply announced it out of the blue very openly, which I found odd but refreshing given the more usual secrecy. Now she denies any affair, claiming to a reporter that she had only a "passionate embrace" with him in the summer of 1974. What prompted her to change her story? Considering the fact that she has been presiding over a Saṅgha devastated by the numerous sex scandals of her predecessor, this failure to truthfully disclose her history with him is a major breach of trust. In an interview for a recent article in Buddhadharma magazine on "abuse of power," she said, "If a teacher is no longer trustworthy, everything is up for examination". It seems clear that the Board of the Zen Studies Society is remiss in its fiduciary duty to the Saṅgha in allowing misguided teachers and impure teachings to continue under its watch.

The Buddha said to his son Rāhula, "hollow and empty...is the reclusheship of those who are not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie...when one is not ashamed to tell a deliberate lie, there is no evil...that one would not do." Someone in a position of spiritual and moral authority needs to uphold the highest principles and behave in an exemplary way.

The Buddha said that "wrong view" (which he defines as all forms of unwholesomeness and ignorance) deviates from the Noble Eightfold Path, thereby undermining and destroying it. These eight factors (right: view, intention, speech, action, livelihood, effort, mindfulness, concentration) are the actual path we are meant to follow, and as part of the Four Noble Truths, the absolute essence of the Buddha's teaching. By turning away from these truths the whole teaching of the Buddha is dismantled, the spiritual life is not lived and liberation is "impossible".

To see things "as they really are" is, according to the Buddha, fundamental to understanding and penetrating the Four Noble Truths and this capability is required before one teaches. He spoke at length of the dangers of overestimating one's attainment and urged careful scrutiny and review. The Buddha said that "those bhikkhus who explain the Dharma as non-Dharma and non-Dharma as Dharma" (and he continues with a long list of other twisted doings) "are acting for the harm of many people, for the ruin, harm and suffering of many people. These bhikkhus generate much demerit and cause the good Dharma to disappear".

The Tathāgata took great pains to clarify his teachings to many seekers (including in large measure Hindu Brahmins), whether they came to him for guidance, to challenge him to a debate or simply to give him a hard time. In various exchanges he carefully refuted all erroneous concepts regarding existence and non-existence, and taught dukkha (suffering), anicca (impermanence) and anattā (nonself). Serious misconceptions are likely to arise when Zen teachers quote Hindu 'sages' such as Nisargadatta Maharaj, a Shaivite, not realizing how profoundly this modern guru's religion differs from that of Buddhism. He worships Shiva as the Supreme Being and teaches devotion towards God and the Guru. He instructs his followers with these words: "Establish yourself firmly in the awareness " I AM" . This is the beginning and also the end of all endeavors".

Other modern day teachers incorporate their lust into the religion by drawing upon practices such as sexual Tantra. This enables them to persuade students that this is an acceptable, or even possible, approach to enlightenment.

In Zen, despite the Tathāgata's teaching and practice of nonviolence, equanimity and calm, we consent to being hit, shouted at, publicly humiliated and the like by roshis as part of the practice. According to the Buddha, noise is a "thorn" to entering samādhi and inimical to the cultivation of serenity and true peace.

There is confusion because some religions emphasize personal devotion and unquestioning obedience to a guru. The consequence of this often becomes mistaking abuse and manipulation for compassionate 'skillful means'. In contrast, the Buddha urged followers to investigate even him (!) for any "unwholesome states" or "mixed states" which if discovered, would indicate he is not in fact truly enlightened.

The Buddha taught a practice filled with gentleness and one that is conducive to peace. He spoke strongly against any form of cruelty and self-indulgence. In the Dhammapada he says



that a true follower of the way has “laid aside the cudgel towards all beings, weak or strong...one should neither kill nor cause others to kill”. (Translated by Ven. Ācharya Buddhārakkhita Thera). Elsewhere in the canon, he details step by step the horrific process of leading an animal to the slaughter, and with unsparing realism tells us of all the “pain and grief” this being suffers, as well as the demerit we accumulate in every phase of causing it harm. He taught compassion and nonviolence as a way of life, yet there are those who consider themselves Buddhists who eat meat.

Eternalism, annihilationism, warped views on causation, cruelty, worship of gods and deities, concepts of self, attachment to impermanent states of oneness or believing them to be enlightenment, are all things the Buddha warned were not his teachings. As we can see by what has been happening all over America, the eclectic approach to Buddhism is a great danger to many beings, an obstacle to spiritual progress, and leads people astray for a very long time. With unrealized teachers so much time is wasted. Before long we are old, and then dead—but not liberated. At least not according to the Noble One’s definition of emancipation.

In the Sallekha Sutra the Tathāgata says: ...“that one who is himself sinking in the mud should pull out another who is sinking in the mud is impossible; ...That one who is himself untamed, undisciplined, [with defilements] unextinguished, should tame another, discipline him and help extinguish [his defilements] is impossible”. (Translated by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi from the Pāli.)

The Buddha said in no uncertain terms that it is better to practice alone, “relying only on the Dharma”, than to follow flawed teachers and teachings. He tells us at length how we are complicit when we follow them, support them, make excuses for ourselves and cover up for them.

He said that if you follow wayward, incomplete teachings you get wayward, incomplete results. One can see this with Zen’s koan system: you get mastery at solving koans. You get teachers keeping you in bondage with their authority. But you don’t come to the end of suffering, which the Buddha said was the true goal of the holy life, until you let go of every last foolish adherence.

It is my hope that by reminding ourselves of the Buddha’s authentic Middle Way, we can have the strength and clarity to restore Buddhism to its pure, noble origins, not just for our own sakes, but for the sake of many, many beings.

Jishu