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…When Shimano's social relationships got him into trouble at the Koko An Zendo in Hawai'i in 1964, he felt obliged to move to New York. My own relationship with Soen Roshi fell apart at that point. He could not believe that Shimano's behavior was not just that of a 'young rascal.' Although we saw each other from time to time after that and remained on fairly cordial terms, I always felt that Soen Roshi blamed me to some extent for Shimano's failure to keep his commitments in Hawai'i.

Soen Roshi continued to be faithful to Eido Shimano over the years that followed. His initial belief that Shimano understood him and his imperative to find a successor with at least half an eye apparently kept his confidence unshaken, until the crisis created by allegations of sexual abuse at the New York Zen Studies Society erupted in 1975. Moreover, his confidence seemed renewed in some limited degree from time to time even after that, almost until the end of his life. The reasons for this continued support have not always been clear to Zen students in the New York sangha and elsewhere in this country.

They are not completely clear to me either, but as best I can understand them, it seems that three factors are involved. The first is that Japanese social relationships are established on Confucian standards of loyalty to the superior and responsibility for the inferior. Translated into terms of teacher and student, this means that the Japanese Zen student and teacher support each other instinctively as part of their cultural mores.

The second factor is that the student and teacher create a special bond over the years of this intimate, one-on-one interaction in the dokusan (interview) room and in their day-by-day association in life together in the monastery. Their affection for each other is as deep as can be found in any family.

Soen Roshi's loyalty to his disciple under trying circumstances can be compared with the action of his ancestor, Torei Zenji, who, I have heard, disowned and defrocked his successor for a major violation of trust in connection with the rebuilding of Ryutakuji after a fire. I sense that Torei felt the monk had violated the Dharma and that this betrayal was serious enough for him to set aside the tradition of personal loyalty to one's student. Otherwise, Torei's own teaching of accepting abuse could be called into question.

The third factor is Soen Roshi's own personality. He was profoundly faithful by nature. In his earliest days at Ryutakuji, he installed his widowed mother in a cottage on the compound of the monastery, where she remained until her death many years later. He called upon her almost every day when he was in residence and read her his mail and listened to her comments. His relationship with Gempo Roshi was that of an adoring son, and when the old teacher died, he mounted his life-sized photograph in the main hall of the monastery. It dominated the room, while the Kanzeon figure on the altar reposed behind its screen.

Once, Soen Roshi asked me, "What is the most important thing in the world?" I did not dare to answer, so he replied for me, "I think friends are the most important thing in the world." Eido Shimano was much more than a friend, and I can only guess at the deep despair he must have felt when he could finally acknowledge to himself that he had been gravely mistaken about him.

From afar, I always wondered if Soen Roshi's extended private retreats in his later years were related to a sense of betrayal by Shimano. His life and his commitments must have seemed to him to be unfulfilled. All the time I knew him, zazen was the way he restored himself, and he believed in the power of one's own zazen to restore others. But zazen in retreat cannot influence others unless they are open to influence.

I mourn our great teacher and the tragedy of those final years.

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