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Dear Kuon and Sangha,

Due to previous committments for the week-end of October 22nd, and also due to many mixed feelings, I cannot be at DBZ in person to join you. However, as Kuon requested, I am sending a letter along with my response to this complex and painful situation.

Before I say anything else, I want to make it very clear that I have the deepest love, respect and gratitude both for Eido Roshi and for Aiho. I think all discussion must take into account the enormous dedication and effort they have both made in behalf of all of us. I think they both have suffered greatly too as a result of this difficulty which keeps arising. It has taken a great toll on everyone.

As a long term student of Eido Roshi's, I have dwelled with this situation for quite a long while now.

In the beginning I was filled with pain, sorrow, blame, and fear. All of my precious illusions about my teacher had been taken from me. At that time Kushu, (Min Pai) said a wonderful thing to me. He said.."you thought you loved Eido Roshi so much. But you just loved your fantasies about him. Now, if you know the truth and still love him, then you are really doing something. That is really love."

This rang a bell with me. I felt he was right. I felt and feel it is our practice to learn to see, love and accept everything "just as it is." I then tried and still try to incorporate this into my practice day after day. More than anything else, I do not want to let anything take my inspiration to do zazen away.

Zazen itself, I feel, is it. It is our essential teacher in the midst of the flux. I have always been enormous grateful for the rare opportunity to go to our zendo, where such wonderful zazen is made available. This itself is a gift beyond gifts and it is directly due to the efforts, spirits and long range dedication of both Eido Roshi and Aiho.

Certainly, however "right action" has to be taken too. There is a fine line between just sitting, and practicing denial. That is not the purpose of our time on the cushion. Certainly, "skillfull means" are required to correct a situation that is painful to all. However, it is a very fine point to really know what these "skillfull means" truly are. This requires, I feel, great wisdom and care.

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As a practicing psychologist and therapist, I often practice family therapy with groups of distressed families. In family therapy theory, we do not focus upon the "identified patient". "The identified patient" is the individual in the family who is "acting out", or feeling the sorrow and pain of the entire group. Initially he is presented as "the sick one", or "bad one." To focus upon the "identified patient" is the easy way out.

In family therapy, we say instead that the "family system" is troubled. The entire system is our patient. Each person in the system is being affected as well as contributing to the mess. We do not focus upon the individuals, but upon the entire system that has to be repaired.

It is my belief that the same thing is true in our zendo. (And also, sadly enough, in many other zen communities in this country, where the same difficulty has appeared.)

We have to look a little further and see that there is something intrinsic to the way this system, (of having a teacher who is considered infallible, all powerful and constantly wise,) affects students and affects the unfortunate teachers too. (In a sense this is a child-like projection of the ideal parent we all long to have.)

Unless a "zen master" is surrounded by peers, by other "masters" and a lineage through which he is constantly refreshed and to which he is constantly accountable, I feel there is great danger in this system in this day and age.

Before each sesshin we announce Sesshin Precautions in order to make the sesshin atmosphere strong and workable. As far as I understand, specific guidelines for behavior have been recently set forth and posted upon the zendo walls.

These social and personal guidelines too should be read aloud routinely, and all should be instructed in them, (including new, incoming students). When carefully taught, and well implemented these guidelines will function to keep the entire zendo atmosphere clear and workable for all.

In a sense these guidelines are the precepts, guidelines to "right action". They are as much a part of zen practice, as sitting and doing zazen. Somehow or other, we have all developed an unrealistic belief that an individual can be or is permanently enlightened. But if essentially, there is "no individual", also, there is no "permanent state of enlightenment". How can there be?

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Indeed there are "enlightened moments" and "enlightened actions." Hopefully as we sit these increase and increase. However, just as we must abide by strict constraints in order to experience the freedom and beauty of zazen, we too must abide by the strict constraints of the precepts in order to experience freedom and beauty in our relationships.

Most of the time, as our zazen deepens, "right action and right thinking" emerge spontaneously. But not always. As we say over and over in morning service, "delusions are endless. I vow to put an end to them all."

In the Jewish tradition, (in which I also participate a great deal), we say that when a person prays with "great love", he/she is then open to the temptation (danger) of "great lust". When a person prays with "great fear and awe", then he/she is open to the temptation (danger) of "great anger."

They also say that one of the greatest "sins", (or errors) is Idol Worship, the hero worship of anything that has form. God is God. Worship God only. This translates to mean, always remember people are people. Or, in our zen terminology, do not put a head on your head. Do not get trapped in attachment to form.

These are human tendencies, and effects of practice. It is my observation that they reach across the boards, across all traditions and to all people. In Judaism the precepts and devotion are emphasized greatly. In zen practice, freedom of spirit and mind are forefront. Without a careful blending of the two, no practice is real or complete.

Perhaps the highest wisdom of all is to be made aware that our teacher is human too, with great strengths and also, like everyone, with issues he must work on. Perhaps the best precaution is to realize that we do not need "hero worship", but that we do need the simple, clear, humble and consistent practice of zazen. What more can any teacher give us? What else are we looking for?

Perhaps it is time to stop emphasizing ranks, titles, and transmissions. All of these lead straight to "hero worship", which is destructive for everyone. Like Nyogen Senzaki with his metrogarten, (kindergarden of students), let us realize that with some luck, maybe we'll get to first grade by the end of our lives.

Let us just simplify and simplify. Let us sit and listen to bells together. Let us sit and listen to the wind, breathe, drink tea. What is our practice, after all, if not discovering for ourselves own true man (woman), of no rank?

My heartfelt gassho to all,



Eshin

cc/Eido Rosh