

SWEEPINGZEN

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The 2012 Annual Meeting of the AZTA by Genjo Marinello

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Recently I had the opportunity to attend the annual meeting of the American Zen Teachers Association. It was a small gathering this year, only 18 people. It was held at the Vermont Zen Center (VZC) in Shelburne. I only have great praise and gratitude for Sensei [Sunyana Graef](#) for hosting the event and for the hospitality offered by VZC's sangha. I think it was a difficult meeting especially for [Shinge Roshi](#), the new abbot of the Zen Studies Society (ZSS), and I to attend, as there has been great tension between us about the course to be followed in the wake of [Eido Shimano's](#) resignation and retirement, which were precipitated by yet another revelation in 2010 of a major ethical breach. Over the course of the gathering she and I both had the opportunity to say what needed to be said, with the support and witness of others. I think everyone could feel a shift and softening between us, which is a relief.

Towards the end of the meeting, I recall Shinge Roshi said to me publicly and privately that many of the steps that I've been putting forth as essential prerequisites for renewal and growth at the ZSS are indeed necessary and would be addressed. The question that remains is when and how will these steps be accomplished, and which if any will be bypassed.

To begin I suggested that Shinge Roshi release the names of the four new ZSS board members and how and why they were selected. In addition, it is imperative that the new ZSS bylaws be made public. Announcing a projected date for the completion and public release of the forensic audit would also go a long way towards real transparency.

I can't know for certain before the new bylaws are released, but I am suspicious that the new structure still does not include a mechanism to have at least half of the board directly elected by the active sangha. Given ZSS's history there needs to be good separation of fiduciary management from the role of abbot.

I'm told the retirement negotiations with Eido Shimano Roshi continue to drag on. My hope is that those negotiations take into account the fact that Eido Roshi's actions have greatly diminished the resources available to the organization. Moreover, I hope the needs of those harmed by his actions are not forgotten. These realities must take precedence over the Shimanos in excess of \$90,000 per year claims for deferred compensation and benefits.

I know that ZSS is working on a land trust deal with the Nature Conservancy and I think everyone will agree that the first use of these monies should be dedicated to the preservation of the properties for generations of Zen students to come. Secondly, these funds should be committed to the healing of organizational ills and establishing a reserve of some portion of these funds to assist those most directly harmed by Eido Roshi's actions. Then and only then should the remainder of these monies be considered to fund the Shimanos retirement needs. If these priorities are not considered in this order, then as Eido Roshi himself would say it is upside down thinking.

Sooner than later ZSS needs to issue some sort of organizational apology conceding that it could have done a better job to protect it's own sangha from Eido Roshi's abuse of his position of power and authority over decades. At the same time, it will be essential to remove all of Eido Roshi's personal possessions from the properties; disputed items will need to be placed in storage off campus. In addition, as soon as possible, Eido Roshi should be excluded from visiting either property, except to do funeral services for those who insist on it and to occasionally visit his family's resting place in Sangha Meadow. I think it is fair to say there was a general consensus of those present that only when there is sufficient separation from Eido Roshi will the complete truth of his abuses of power and authority be revealed.

When the above steps have been completed it will become possible to do further outreach to those most harmed and alienated with the intent of offering some process of truth and reconciliation at meetings held at neutral locations supported by professional moderators. Part of the reconciliation process will need to include more all sangha meetings where the whole sangha and organizational leadership can learn together with professional assistance how to recognize and help prevent further abuses. This list may not be exhaustive, but I hope everyone reading this can agree these are the steps that must be taken if there is any hope for a deep recovery at ZSS.

I do wish Shinge Roshi and the ZSS board best success and good speed in accomplishing these goals. I understand that at the current pace, this may take two or more years. Many demand a faster pace, but continuous small steps in the right direction are far better than none. Once there is more separation from Eido Roshi and bylaws adjusted to allow significantly more democratic representation, I will make every effort to resume a more direct and active role in ZSS's practice schedule and further recovery. Only time will tell if the current ZSS leadership has the fortitude to follow through.

With palms together,

Genjo