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No pension for Eido Shimano

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Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia -- In Zen teachings, one is taught to note "the coming and going of nothing". Just as the sound that leaves the wooden fish the moment the paddle hits the block, Dharma learners are taught to relinquish any notion of permanence at any point which it arises. Like the sound that meanders away as the gong is hit, or the smoke that rises and disappears when incense is lit. They are taught to be aware of traces, and that too inherently will disappear.

In the ongoing suit against the Zen Studies Society (ZSS) by its previous abbot Eido Shimano – who is seeking payment of pension due to him (see here) - the ZSS needs to be clear on its spiritual and moral authority. The person who was asked to leave the organization was not asked to do so out of personal contempt or politics.

That person was asked to leave because he failed the fiduciary duty expected of a person of the Buddhist robe, that is to help bring peace and enlightenment to people that come to him. What transpired instead is one who had become a lustful demon disguised as a person of the robe and through it, had taken sexual advantage of people who he purports to help bring peace and enlightenment.

While Eido Shimano may have been the catalyst of establishing the roots of Zen within ZSS, it certainly does not mean that ZSS is obligated to support its founder for life. The crux of the matter is this: There have been allegations of sexual misconduct on the part of Eido Shimano. There are explicit evidences forwarded by victims themselves. These accounts are compiled and documented for public view via the Internet.

By all accounts this monk has been "defeated" in the traditional sense of Dharma-Vinaya (Buddha's teachings and his discipline).

As such, he is no longer a monk in the spiritual sense and by that it means that he is cut off from the lineage that ties ZSS to its Japanese Buddhist roots. That being the case, according to the Vinaya (parajika) by natural law he is considered an outcaste, "excommunicated" from ZSS in all sense of meaning (spiritual, moral and legal).

In this circumstance, it would seem imprudent for the ZSS to have established any legal agreement to support the pension of a person who has abused his position and influence.

The ZSS board needs to be aware that this case is no longer confined to the boundary of its estate. Eido Shimano's misdeeds and unsavory tales have already travelled far and wide. If the ZSS is sincere in maintaining its lineage and keeping its name as a trusted center for Zen learning, it has to re-engage with the community and show that it cares for Dharma learning. That it cares for people who come to the center seeking peace and personal enlightenment.

And it can only do that if it banishes whatever traces of Shimano saga left on its doorsteps. Yes, he came, he founded, he gave, he helped and he taught at the ZSS. But he also badly misbehaved.

Like smoke that trails off after the incense is lit, or the sound of the gong meandering off into the dead of night after it is hit, ZSS must do the right thing. The society must banish any thoughts of compensating Eido Shimano his due pension.

Let the teachings of "coming and going of nothing" ring true within the four corners of ZSS. Be aware of his traces but not be bound by it. Only then can real healing truly begin for everyone concerned.

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