

# GENKAKU-AGAIN (adam fisher)

Monday, June 10, 2013

## shame

It's a bit too precious and too convoluted as written, but since I am too lazy to rewrite it and since



various recent conversations put me in mind of it, I will put it here so I'll know where to find it -- a 30-plus-year-old incident that had some impact in its time, but now is just a small shard in the mosaic of depredations of the Zen teacher Eido Tai Shimano.

SHAME (6/10/13)

Shortly before 3 a.m. on Oct. 5, 1982, a forty-two-year-old house painter and Zen student got out of bed, sipped a little cold coffee and headed out the door of his 88th Street apartment in Manhattan. He was sleepy. He was scared. And he was determined.

As he walked south along Third Avenue, the streets were largely empty. A few trucks, a few taxis and a few buses plied their trade, but in a city as jam-packed as New York, this was an empty time and the emptiness seemed to compound his sense of fear. What if he were seen or caught red-handed breaking the law? How could he deny that the plastic bag in his right hand contained cans of spray paint and that the spray paint belonged to him?

Nineteen blocks later, he turned left on 69th Street and walked east until he stood in front of 356 East 69th, a handsome brownstone in an equally-handsome neighborhood and home to Eido Tai Shimano, a Zen Buddhist teacher who had collected an often-well-heeled following since his arrival in the United States 20-or-more years before.

The sandstone stairs leading up to the front door lay in partial shadow, partial street-lamp light.

The forty-two-year-old house painter and Zen student withdrew one of the spray cans from his bag, shook it until the small steel ball within rattled to indicate the paint was well-mixed, and then sprayed first one and then another of the sandstone stairs: "SHAME." The paint had been deliberately purchased in an oil-base form -- something that could not be washed off easily as water-base paint might be. With luck, it would be mostly dry before the sun came up and the lawbreaker's handiwork was discovered.

With a sense of partial relief, the man replaced the can in the bag, looked up and down the street to check for witnesses and walked away. The relief was partial because there was one more stop to make, one more law to break.

Two blocks away, at 223 East 67th St., lay the Zen temple Shobo Ji, a converted carriage house with an ornate set of double doors. How many times had the Zen student and house painter lovingly stripped and sanded and revarnished those doors over his eight-plus years of Zen practice? It was many and he had been happy to do it ... but not today, not Oct. 5, 1982. Today was a day on which to withdraw another spray can, shake it, and spray on the temple doors he had maintained ... "SHAME."

This was the temple that Eido Shimano's followers had provided for him. He 'ran' it. It was through his efforts that the idea had become a reality. His followers were quick to credit his efforts but less capable of acknowledging that without them, he and his efforts would have been meaningless. Eido Shimano did not disabuse his loyal followers. He accepted and subtly encouraged their fealty. He was the who of Zen Studies Society, the umbrella organization that oversaw both Shobo Ji and the monastery in the Catskills, Dai Bosatsu.

And now, today, one of his followers was drawing a line ... SHAME. On the one hand, it was just a bit of scurrilous graffiti. On the other, it was a summing up of Shimano's previous and future years as what some called a "Zen master." He had manipulated and abused women students ... and would again. He had manipulated and abused the finances of Zen Studies Society ... and would again. There was no pervasive Internet use at the time and so it had taken years for the evidence to accumulate and make itself felt: Shimano had betrayed his own teachings and hurt quite a lot of people into the bargain.

Was there a better word than SHAME?

The forty-two-year-old house painter and Zen student was, of course, me. It was I who was tired and determined and scared. I was scared not just that the police might catch and prosecute me but also that I might incur some mystical wrath from the brightness of the Zen Buddhism I had followed as best I might: Not only were the cops going to hit me on the nose with a rolled up newspaper, but the Buddhist tradition itself might exact some fearsome, hell-bound, karmic price. Toe the mark or risk reprisal ... that was Shimano's teaching and I too had ingested it. But not today, not Oct. 5, 1982.

Looking back on that one small adventure, that shard in the mosaic that is Shimano's corruption, I am no longer afraid. In fact, there is a part of me which pats a younger and more frightened me on the back.

I was right.

Buddhism is worth the risk.

PS. For those seeking some verification of Eido Shimano's self-anointing adventures, a good source is the [Shimano Archives](#). Those wishing corroboration of the spray-painting incident may want to peruse a letter Eido Shimano [sent to the sangha](#) ... the letter itself is a wonderful example of Shimano's executive ability not to address issues directly.

