

December 16, 2010

An Open Letter to The Directors of the Zen Studies Society,  
From Zogen

Dear Directors of The Zen Studies Society,

I want to add my voice to the on-going discussion of your recent choices and the long history of the abuse of power by the titular leader of Zen Studies Society, Eido Shimano Roshi. This most recent prolonged surge of indignation, and moral revulsion, brings to the fore the decades-long history of suppressed instances of unacceptable behavior by your Teacher and, it reveals an astonishing degree of complacency demonstrated, and continued in evidence, by all of you.

You, and your many predecessors, understandably, were, and are still, reluctant to confront your beloved Teacher, let alone condemn and remove him. No one among us, lay practitioners, can imagine what it might be like to do that. After all, your own most intimate experiences of practice and memories of Dharma teachings, are forever bound with your Roshi. Some of you have more intimate memories, associated with him, and derive your authority from Zen training, ordination and, for some of you, Dharma Transmission received from Eido Shimano Roshi. Existing "official" structures, i.e. statutory and procedural, "lock" you into a "loyalty trap", leaving not much space between acquiescence and withdrawal.

Your position is no less than tragic -- even more so now, when "all" has been exposed on the world-wide web. But, your Teacher's position is no less tragic than yours: Eido Shimano Roshi systematically destroyed everything he wanted, originally, to create and, compromised everything he was entrusted to keep and protect. His reputation, as a practicing Buddhist Teacher and Abbot, is gone; the standing of The Zen Studies Society within the American Buddhist community has been destroyed; all donors, and most of the former supporters-- any possibility of financial support from them is gone. ZSS "membership" is a sham; and, the first Buddhist Monastery, created de novo in America, stands essentially empty.

Your silence and your way of "proceeding as if nothing untoward has ever happened" decisively grant Eido Shimano Roshi a license of moral and practical impunity. Permitting your Teacher to conduct Jukai in October of this year is only the most recent example of your habitual default. In that, you are being disloyal not only to our Sangha but, above all, to your own Roshi -- leaving him at the mercy of his own contemptuous arrogance and his voracious appetites. Who can trust you unless you are prepared to make a "break" with your complacent attitude and unfetter yourselves from the "loyalty trap"?

This letter is intended as an appeal to your Dharma-inspired sense of moral obligation and as an invitation to all practitioners concerned with the state of affairs within ZSS, to move our discussion beyond expressions of moral indignation alone. The recommendations of The Faith Trust Institute were an excellent start but did not extend to a series of practical suggestions which might help us to move towards the restoration of integrity and dignity to ZSS.

Before discussing some of the possible solutions to our outstanding dilemmas, I would like to state, unequivocally, that I had never had any "standing" in administration or governance of any component of ZSS, nor do I have any ambition to represent anyone. My hope is that some of the thoughts and ideas, in this letter, might be useful in resolving our current painful impasse and will serve as a beginning of reconciliation and coming together of a true Sangha.

A few words about my background and the nature of my "connection" to ZSS. My professional formation was that of a clinical psychiatrist but the second half of my 40-year career was spent in corporate consulting, individual and organizational -- conflict resolution, leadership team and organizational development, mergers and restructuring of acquisitions. I have had a long and varied experience of human rights advocacy-- the struggle against the use of psychiatry as tool for political control, and organizing and fund raising efforts on behalf of Amnesty International USA. I have participated in the healing process for the victims of torture and relief programs for political prisoners. Since the mid-70s, I have had numerous occasions to hear, entirely unsolicited, reports about Eido Shimano Roshi's conduct with women, among his students, ordained priests and, even, one of his Dharma heirs. I am not given to gossip but these persistent reports were enough to move me to maintain a distance from Dai Bosatsu Zendo and Shobo-ji communities.

However, I continued to practice and, periodically, participate in weekend and full Sesshins. Years later, I was fortunate enough to meet a Teacher within the American Rinzai tradition and took Jukai at DBZ. I was present at past anniversary celebrations both for Eido Roshi and Dai Bosatsu Zendo.

This letter is signed with my Dharma name-- Zogen.

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Members of the Board of Directors of the Zen Studies Society, I am grateful for your attention to the following:

1. There is an overwhelming amount of evidence that Eido Shimano Roshi consistently violated Buddhist precepts over a period of decades. By conducting his responsibilities as Abbot and Main Teacher in this manner, and maintaining his authority and total control, he has shown no regard for the

safety and dignity of his students. The reputation and well-being of his Zendos are at risk, and the dignity of the Rinzaï tradition has been besmirched. For ignoring the needs of the Zen Studies Society Sangha and materially jeopardizing the best interests of the entire organization, Eido Shimano Roshi forfeited any vestige of his spiritual and moral authority. Eido Shimano Roshi must immediately be censured by the ZSS Board and removed from his position for cause.

2) In view of the lack of moral clarity demonstrated during this most recent scandal, and, a consistent lack of loyalty to all members of ZSS Sangha, the following conclusion is inescapable. The ZSS Board of Directors destroyed any vestige of their legitimacy and forfeited any claim on the trust from the ZSS Sangha. In addition, the ZSS Board of Directors is in violation of their fiduciary responsibility role not only toward the founders of both zendos but, also, towards all practitioners and supporters who, at one time or another, contributed to the growth of and in whose name this Board exercises its authority.

3. This most recent scandal reveals once again that there are grave inadequacies in the statutory organizational structure, governance and procedures of ZSS. The current Board of Directors, during its tenure, failed to address these obvious and long-standing limitations. These inadequacies are, in part, the reason for the lack of prescribed mechanisms to seek discussion and promote change within the organization. They all contributed to the current state of affairs.

4. There is no "real", i.e. confirmed membership in ZSS; no mechanisms, by which individual members might choose to participate in ZSS administrative, economic or public relations activities. There is no grievance process or advocacy guaranteed by ZSS by-laws. There is no transparency or accountability in handling ZSS substantial properties, income or budgetary allocations. There is no coherent process for appointing Board members. In conclusion: there are no forms of accountability or transparency at any level of ZSS.

Dharma is without end but The Zen Studies Society functions in real time and place. There are no examples of such an authoritarian and totalitarian governing structure among other Buddhist organizations. No wonder that some of the discussants made references to ZSS being a "cult".

Here are some of the proposed actions for your consideration. Following an immediate removal of Eido Shimano Roshi, and his wife Aiho, from any position of teaching and administrative authority, the following steps should be considered:

1. The ZSS Board should immediately call on all relevant regulatory authorities (The Internal Revenue Service, The Secretary of State of the

state of New York, The Attorney General's Office) to seek advise and guidance in organizing a thorough property survey and financial audit.

ZSS is a non-profit organization, and as such, was registered with the Department of State of New York. It was recognized, as a non-profit, by the Internal Revenue Service and NYS Tax Authority. The Attorney General has an obligation to investigate all violations of fiduciary responsibilities and other violations of laws. These agencies have the power, the means and an obligation to combat abuses of all kinds, including breaches of fiduciary responsibility.

2) The ZSS Board should seek guidance in appointing interim (transitional) Trustees to oversee the transition, safeguard the remaining assets of ZSS, and initiate a reconciliation process.

3) An appeal to other Buddhist communities, who had similar experiences in the past, will be crucial in legitimizing the Society's restored integrity and will help us heal and return to full participation in Buddhist life in America. ZSS should immediately convene the meeting of all Dharma heirs and invite participation of senior teachers, from other Zen centers, who command trust and respect. These teachers will be available not only to advise transitional Trustees but, also to support their activities. All phases of this process, which will involve institutional reform, should be publicly available and Sangha participation should be sought at all points.

4) We should plan for an orderly and dignified process of conciliation, healing our Sangha. This is not possible without developing a comprehensive list of those practitioners who still feel commitment to either Dai Bosatsu Zendo or Shobo-ji and want to be considered active members of ZSS. The lists of attendees, from both Zendos, and the list of contributors should be integrated and people's interests surveyed electronically. This is a crucial expenditure and the result will allow us to move forward the process of renewal at ZSS. The resulting Sangha membership list will allow balloting by e-mail and other forms of participation. The practice of "sanitizing" mailing lists, to include only complacent students, should be abolished immediately and repudiated publicly. This leads to "excommunications" of dedicated students, Sangha "members", monks, nuns and residents of DBZ, who contributed their sincere efforts and resources over the years. These Good Efforts sustained our practice at Dai Bosatsu Zendo and Shobo-ji since the very beginning. Their contribution entitles them to have a voice in our discussions about the future of ZSS.

5) A working group, dedicated to developing a draft of ZSS new statutes and by-laws, should be formed by the transitional Trustees. A timetable for the completion of this project should be reasonably short and the draft should be widely discussed by all members of our Sangha.

6) Following the above described steps, the ZSS Board of Directors should resign and facilitate an orderly transfer of their responsibilities to an interim Board. They will oversee-- with utmost accountability and transparency-- The Zen Studies Society's transition to a new form of governance. This will be the result of a collaborative effort of all members of ZSS Sangha and will be arrived at in a democratic way.

7) As ZSS is entering this period of change and renewal, we, all, should be concerned with the role of care-takers of ongoing programs and maintenance of Dai Bosatsu Zendo and Shobo-ji. Senior monk Seigan has recently resigned from his responsible position in New York City Zendo and the number of resident monks and nuns at DBZ has been pitifully small for years. We should look to our internal resources, i.e. volunteer effort and hired personnel.

WE SHOULD BEGIN PLANNING FOR TRANSITION NOW.

There will be those who will object that what I propose here "comes too late", or that a "plan" is already in place. Thinking of these objections, I am reminded of an old saying: "When your wine turns to vinegar - don't pour the new wine into the old skin. Fashion new skins before you pour your new wine." This is a critical time for "breaking of the vessels"-- the time for renewal. Eido Shimano Roshi consistently demonstrated undisguised contempt for our culture and American Zen practitioners, who supported him in every conceivable way and had given him the means to be a teacher and live in considerable comfort.

The Zen Society Board of Directors has taken a most cynical path of delays, obfuscation, misdirection and information withholding. This time such tactics should not be allowed to numb us to yet another scandal, dispirit us and make us despair of any possibility of change.

We are all the "stakeholders" of Zen Studies Society-- Teachers and students, residents and visitors, who come back for more, nuns and monks, ordained and never ordained, Dharma heirs acknowledged or not-- ALL who want to participate in extricating our organization from the autocratic control of one man who has no ounce of legitimacy left.

It is clear that The Zen Studies Society cannot continue, much less sustain itself while yoked to the presence and reputation of its Abbot. The Boards' continuing tacit permissiveness towards Eido Shimano Roshi, like endorsing his continued access to students, is unacceptable. His continuing de facto authority as senior Abbot is unacceptable. *Shimano Roshi must immediately be censured by the ZSS Board and removed from his position for cause.*

Nothing less will begin to restore our hope that ZSS might become, one day, what it was meant to become: a serene place of practice and learning, an



oasis of Buddhist wisdom, an inspiring example of Right Living, of Precepts as a living reality.

Please consider this appeal. I am grateful for the attention you have given to this letter. If you find it worthy of attention, please forward it to your fellow-practitioners.

Gassho,

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You may comment on this letter in one of the following blogs:

1. <http://www.tricycle.com/p/2271>
2. <http://robertaitken.blogspot.com/2010/05/eido-tai-shimano-roshi.html?commentPage=2>
3. <http://genkaku-again.blogspot.com/2010/02/eido-tai-shimano.html?commentPage=12>
4. <http://www.zenforuminternational.org/viewtopic.php?f=68&t=3584&sid=f05221a243af08560f5d51ee25a20b14&start=680>

I requested that Andy Afable make this letter widely available.