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Turning the Wheel at Zen Studies Society?

Posted on [January 1, 2011](#)

This afternoon, ushering in a new year, a new decade, and—I hope—a new turning of the dharma wheel in America, Shinge Roshi Sherry Chayat was installed as abbot of Dai Bosatsu Zendo in upstate New York. I celebrate her new position. And I hope that with the collaboration of her dharma brother Genjo Marinello, and support from many friends in the Western Buddhist community, Shinge Roshi is able to guide Dai Bosatsu and the Zen Studies Society far from the sexual opportunism and manipulation that have discredited the organization and defaced the career of their founder Eido Shimano for more than forty years.

This matter has troubled me for the last sixteen years, having spoken with women who were abused and psychologically harmed by Eido Shimano's addictive misogyny. For some of the details—tip of the iceberg, to tell the truth—see Mark Oppenheimer's August 20, 2010 article in the New York Times, "Sex Scandal Has U.S. Buddhists Looking Within." < <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/08/21/us/21beliefs.html? r=1>>

There is more that I could say, and more that my sisters and brothers in the American Zen Teachers Association have said directly and publicly to the Zen Studies Society Board. The fact is that even with a new abbot and the best of intentions, it will be very hard to turn things around. Patterns of secrecy, power, woundedness are all part of the arc of trauma. This goes for individuals and institutions. This trauma cannot be addressed if Eido Shimano holds on to any vestige of teaching or organizational authority at ZSS.

Some of my friends have called for a "truth and reconciliation" process at ZSS. Not a legal proceeding, but a setting in which victims and perpetrators meet face to face. This is a step toward restorative justice, which seems to me a proper Buddhist response to harm.

I am including here a copy of the letter that I faxed and mailed to the Zen Studies Society Board on December 30.

Joe Soun Dowling

Zen Studies Society Board President

New York Zendo, Shobo-Ji

223 West 67th Street

New York, NY 10065

30 December 2010

Dear Mr. Dowling, ZSS Board and sangha members,

As a Zen teacher and practitioner I have been taught that the dharma is our refuge; that each of us must make the practice we love safe for all who wish to share it. For more than sixteen years, dating back to my tenure as director of Buddhist Peace Fellowship, I been hearing from women who were sexually victimized and emotionally harmed by Eido Shimano. Over the years I have also spoken with numerous other members of the ZSS community concerned about Eido's depredations. Sadly, most of them left the community in frustration and dismay. Some of them turned away from Zen practice entirely.

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In August of 1995 I was a signatory on a private letter from Robert Aitken Roshi and a group of western Zen teachers to the ZSS board, strongly raising our concerns about sexual abuse and manipulation in your community. At the heart of that letter was this concern: "Our deepest wish is for a healing on all sides: for those who have suffered abuse, for your Sangha, and for Shimano Roshi." That is still my concern, but look how many years have passed, and how many women and men continue to suffer from Eido Shimano's sexual addiction, misuse of authority, and inability to take responsibility for his actions? Irrespective of so-called insight and "Samadhi power," I would say that his behavior has nothing to do with Zen or Buddhism, where the Bodhisattva's precepts are the lifeblood of practice.

I truly support Shinge Roko Chayat, along with Genjo Marinello, as they strive to provide principled leadership for the Zen Studies Society. But at last it is time for the ZSS board to step up to its responsibilities. I urge you to remove Eido Shimano Roshi from all positions of teaching and authority at ZSS immediately. He needs help. Strongly and skillfully, the board must make this clear to him. It is also essential for the board to let the wider Buddhist community know that you understand your responsibility to uphold the dharma. Please, no more half-truths, no more painful public idealizations of Eido. If you fail to take decisive and public action, as each successive board over the last thirty years has failed, then I fear for the future of Zen Studies Society, Shobo-ji, and Dai Bosatsu. Please take care of your community so the flame of dharma can at last burn clear and bright.

Sincerely,

Hozan Alan Senauke

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About asenauke

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4 Responses to *Turning the Wheel at Zen Studies Society?*



nathan says:

January 1, 2011 at 5:58 pm

May the leaders and members of ZSS use Manjushri's sword with swiftness and clarity in this new year.

[Reply](#)

Kobutsu Malone says:

January 3, 2011 at 2:24 pm

"Some of my friends have called for a "truth and reconciliation" process at ZSS. Not a legal proceeding, but a setting in which victims and perpetrators meet face to face. This is a step toward restorative justice, which seems to me a proper Buddhist response to harm."

I have heard from a number of "survivors" who are appalled at the above suggestion. The three "survivors" in my family will publicly refuse to take part in such a process. I know of four other "survivors" who want no part of any such endeavor.

While it may seem to be a "proper Buddhist response" it indicates that the people putting forward such a suggestion do not fully understand the nature of the problem. "Survivors" will refuse to be used by Roko Chayat and the ZSS spin-doctors by taking part in any such charade.

Maybe in five years, maybe after court proceedings, maybe after a lot of things. The American (and Japanese) Zen community has consistently failed to deal with this issue, the ZSS leaders have been consistently wrong in their perceptions of this whole business, unable to deal with the reality of the damage done and largely remained in denial. Why should such grievously injured people be subjected to further humiliation by such individuals?

Mr. Shimano is still in control of ZZS and Roko.... this is not the time for bringing up "truth and reconciliation" matters. I stand in adamant opposition to even raising the prospect of "truth and reconciliation" at this point in time.

[Reply](#)



asenauke says:

January 6, 2011 at 3:55 pm

A week or so has passed, and at this point, hearing what I hear, I worry that Eido is still trying to control things. I tend to agree now that "truth and reconciliation" is not called for now. I would rather see a legal proceeding that holds Eido directly accountable to those he has harmed. If that happens, then maybe someday there is basis for a restorative approach.

I was floating an idea. Notice this idea was not included in my letter to the ZSS board.

Hozan

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