

ARIAKE

"A Nun's Faith is Smashed"

Ariake is in her early 50s. It has been 10 years since Ariake's experience and 7 years since the last telephone contact with her teacher [Eido Shimano], who was Japanese and her first Zen teacher. Ariake had practiced briefly with other Buddhist traditions before coming to the teacher in her story. Ariake's is not one of the original eight stories and it was not included in the stories responded to by the interviewees because it arrived too late in the study. Ariake did, however, respond to the original eight stories herself, and her response is presented with the others. Here is her story.

I started my practice in 1978, and met my Zen teacher [Eido Shimano] in 1979. The zendo [Dai Bosatsu Zendo] was quite a distance from where I lived, so for the first 5 years I saw my teacher only at sesshins. In 1983, I became a resident at the monastery [Dai Bosatsu Zendo] and, in 1984, I was ordained and joined the staff.

I feel the betrayal happened long before the first incident of sexual abuse because the "Zen institution" [Zen Studies Society] set Roshi [Eido Shimano] up as enlightened and infallible. Even when I heard rumors that Roshi [Eido Shimano] had had sex with students, there was no mention of students in any way being harmed. Because Roshi [Eido Shimano] was very charismatic and attractive, I took it upon myself to ensure that nothing sexual would happen between us. I was afraid to show any friendliness towards him at all and tried to make myself unattractive. That effort impaired our relationship.

I was intimidated by Roshi [Eido Shimano], as were a lot of students. Basically, you never knew what he would do, so you walked on eggs. A lot of ego-bashing went on in the name of the dharma. Roshi [Eido Shimano] trashed students in front of others and I could not always see that the student had done anything wrong. Indeed, this humiliation seemed quite arbitrary. Roshi [Eido Shimano] was emotionally abusive to me, too, all those years. The more serious the student, the more abuse (s)he might expect from the teacher, and it seemed there was some kind of Zen rule

that students should never be given any praise. This abuse was thought to be Zen Roshi behavior.

I feel this whole climate is what made it easy for my teacher [Eido Shimano] to eventually abuse me sexually. The first incident happened when I had been a student for 9 years. I had just finished a 1,000-day monastery commitment and voluntary celibacy vow. It was summer and the schedule was much more relaxed than the usual strict asceticism. On this particular rest day we had an all-day picnic.

By the time evening fell, I was quite shamefully intoxicated. In a quiet moment I was inspired by a drunken insight. Like a little child I wanted to present it to Roshi [Eido Shimano]. I hurried back to the main building and saw Roshi [Eido Shimano] looking out the window, but when I entered the building the lights were off. I saw him standing on the landing just outside his quarters. Excited by my insight, I bravely went straight up the stairs. On the small landing I found myself standing very close to him. I felt intimidated by this close proximity and spontaneously placed the flat of my hand on the front of his shoulder. Perhaps this was intended to bridge the gap between this giant and myself. He [Eido Shimano] drew me closer and kissed me. Things went from there.

The next day I thought, "Maybe this is okay. It might broaden our relationship." We had never had good communication, and there was this Zen thing about not having to communicate verbally; I had never talked to Roshi [Eido Shimano] about what was going on in my practice. Intermittently for the next three years we had a sexualized teacher/student relationship, although he was married. It took me a long time to see that something was wrong, but in hindsight I would say from the time things were sexualized I no longer had a teacher.

It really hit me that something was very wrong when one day Roshi [Eido Shimano] suddenly turned on me for no reason. I was getting transmission about how to do ceremonies, weddings, and funerals needed in a career as a priest. During one of those teaching meetings, Roshi [Eido Shimano] misunderstood a statement I made-and went ballistic. In a rage he turned on me, shouting in his huge Zen voice. I was stunned. In that moment it all came together for me that something was terribly wrong. For a person to speak this way to someone they were having sex with no longer seemed like something Zen, but just very sick behavior. I went to my room where I cried for 3 days, unable to stop or leave the room. I realized that everything

was destroyed. The unthinkable had happened. The relationship with my teacher [Eido Shimano] and the zendo [Dai Bosatsu Zendo] was over.

I spent the next 3 years trying to reconcile with Roshi [Eido Shimano]. All I wanted was to be back in the monastery. The meaning and purpose of my life, my vocation, was to be a nun, a monastic. I couldn't do that now without being reconciled. In the end I just disappeared very quietly from the sangha, and since then I haven't been practicing in community. I tried going other places because I thought I'd go crazy from the isolation, but it was so heartbreaking, I couldn't. My practice, although solitary, has helped me, and without it I don't know if I would have survived. But it has gradually deteriorated, 'til it's practically nothing.

My faith was smashed. I believed that Zazen was going to be truly transformative and up to a point it was. In the early years of practice, I was healed physically and emotionally. I can't understand how I have lost faith even in spite of precious Dharma experience.

I am dismayed that the power/energy from practice can be used for other than good. My teacher [Eido Shimano] used that power—not just the power of position, but spiritual power—to manipulate and in other ways harm people. He sometimes used that power to trigger something in the heart chakra. I thought he did this with everybody, as some kind of blessing to help students open up. Now I wonder about the motivation, as Roshi's [Eido Shimano] negative energy was also very powerful.

I finally gave up trying to reconcile after a phone conversation in which Roshi [Eido Shimano] spewed out such hatred that, when I hung up, I vomited. After that, I would sometimes wake up in the night and start crying. I would cry until I began gagging and vomiting. I know this sounds extreme, but four different people have reported bouts of vomiting after being sexually abused by this teacher. One student vomited right in the street in front of the zendo [New York Zendo Shobo-ji] after an encounter with him.

In some ways I've functioned fairly well in the 10 years since I had to leave my zendo, and until just this year I have had the joy of service through my own dharma work. It has been most fulfilling, but the work has been greatly hampered by not being affiliated with a zendo. However, my functioning seems more impaired as time goes on. Hours of emotional

suffering have been part of every day in these 10 years. For the first 3 years I cried. As time went on and I wasn't getting to sesshin, I started to get angry. The more I saw that maybe I couldn't go back at all and that nothing was being done about continuing conditions, the angrier I became.

I see the problem more in the structure of things than in the fact that one person has problems. For one thing, we see (are encouraged to see) teachers as being different/ superhuman. I didn't just get that idea myself, it was a real set-up. We're led into believing this because of how it's presented by the Zen institution. The teacher isn't going to do anything wrong because teachers are good guys, right? Students are very idealistic, very sincere, and devoted to what this teacher/student relationship is supposed to be. Roshi [Eido Shimano] was the primary relationship of everybody there. No one thought of dissent.

Attempts at change have been futile. Roshi [Eido Shimano] was even investigated by the sex crimes division of the office of District Attorney [New York City], but nothing could be done because, in our state, if there is no "forcible rape" there is no criminal offense. For decades, attempts by the sangha to oust Roshi [Eido Shimano] have been unsuccessful. A unanimous vote of the board is needed for that, and Roshi [Eido Shimano] is a member of the board.

This year I've stopped crying and being angry quite so much, instead I'm now going into a depression. This trauma has taken all meaning out of my life, and it has affected every relationship I have, including those with my own children. I feel cut off from others and from my own heart. I haven't told anyone close to me about this. I gained 90 pounds in a very short period. I think it helps me to avoid having a sexual relationship, which I've never had again.

It feels as if I've got no life. "Get a life!" I could get one, but I don't know how, or where, any more. It's heartbreaking. I wake up every morning thinking, "I don't know where to go, what to do...." Nowadays I'm thinking maybe I had to go back to square one and totally lose my practice in order to start it again without Roshi.

I don't see this as something that happened in the past, it's still happening. The damage to my life is extensive, but worst of all has been the destruction of my religious vocation and the corrosion of a once strong practice. I have not found resources for healing, as other than the healing of

the whole sangha, the only healing I could find would be through Zazen. Zazen and sesshin have been the most precious things in my life, aside from life itself. I don't understand why I am not able to do this thing I love so much. I just want my practice back.
