

Genjo's memories

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I would like to share with you some thoughts I have shared with others who have asked me how I can continue to train with Eido Roshi....

I heard of Eido Roshi's history with students, 15 years ago, before I started to train with him. I also knew that he was confronted more than once about it, by Aiken Roshi, Soen Roshi, members of AZTA, members of his own Board of Directors and senior students. Because of his poor response, or lack of it, to these confrontations, I also knew that he lost many Sangha and board members over his indiscretions. Nevertheless, I was instructed to train with him by my ordination teacher, Genki Takabayashi Roshi, for continuation of koan training, as Genki Roshi was of failing health, near retirement and did not have the English skills, nor did I have the Japanese skills, to complete the curriculum. There was, at the time, only one other Japanese Rinzai lineage holder living in the USA I could have trained with, and frankly I had also heard that he had the same kinds of problems as Eido Roshi.

I met with Eido Roshi about 14 years ago, we evaluated each other, and we found in each other a promising match, and slowly he became my "core" teacher and ultimately my Dharma Father. Please note in the whole time I have trained with him there has not been even one hint of a complaint of sexual indiscretion that I know of, and I should know, as I have trained with him intimately for all these years and have had five unsui (monks), three female, training with him fulltime for various periods in the years I have been associated with him. If there was some sort of smoking gun of continued indiscretions, I cannot believe I wouldn't have heard of them by now, especially given what has been recently released and propagated on the Internet.

I have heard him take all responsibility for all the failings that have befallen him and his organization because of his actions, saying repeatedly and publicly that "It has been only my own failings that led to those that have left." I have watched him grow and mellow over the years, which is all we can ask of anyone. I have dinner regularly with people who have murdered in cold blood, and those who have done other crimes, but are now caring, productive, enlightened members of society. Eido Roshi's actions were not even illegal, just unconscionable by our standards, still it is not like he forced, bribed, coerced or paid anyone to have sex with him. No one has ever claimed that he has had any relationships with anyone except consenting adults, who should of known better themselves. Granted the power dynamic is totally lopsided and his responsibility for these actions is 80% or more, but not all his. Please know that if his behavior had continued, I too would have confronted him. I have never been, nor will I ever be part of a cover-up.

As to why I continue to associate with him, he has demonstrated to my satisfaction, that he can see, hear, speak and act as the ancestors of our lineage; moreover, he has thirty years of experience and practice on me, and I will never catch up to his abilities in this regard. Why then would I remove myself from his council? I will be so fortunate to have it as long as I can. And then there is a debt of gratitude I owe to the lineage and to him specifically. I will do my best to repay it, by supporting and working to continue the best of his work, while leaving behind that which does not work.

Here is part of a letter that I wrote to him on the occasion of his 70th birthday, almost eight years ago:

For the last seven years, it has been my great good fortune to train twice a year at sesshin with Eido Roshi and the Dai Bosatsu Sangha. I cannot relay properly how important these years have been to my formation. I am ever so grateful for the opportunity to do sesshin with Eido Roshi, and I believe over time we are deeply cementing our Dharma relationship. Doing Dokusan with Eido Roshi, who has a complete grasp of the English language and American vernacular, is like resolving a well-known picture into a refined pristine focus where nuances and understandings to koans become perfectly clear and undisguised. Doing sesshin with Eido Roshi is like participating in symphony with a masterful conductor who can bring both sesshin and Dokusan practice to a powerful crescendo.

For any life, the greatest task is to burn off as much Shuku-go (karmic residue) as possible. I believe this is the greatest gift we can give to the world, as this combustion frees us to be naturally clear and compassionate in our thoughts and actions. The genuine Rinzai Zen practice that Eido Roshi has fostered at Dai Bosatsu is like a furnace designed to burn through the many layers of karmic hindrance that we all carry. All of us who have had the good fortune to train at DBZ are strongly challenged to do our bone-crunching best, and no finer demonstration of this sincere dedication can be found than in Eido Roshi's own example to us. This training offers us an inexhaustible path to face the inconceivable and shifts the dedicated practitioner from a narrow self-centered view to a collective or universal principle view, a view that arises from true insight into the nature of reality. The training offered at DBZ is like water to a desert. We who have the opportunity to train with Eido Roshi could not be more fortunate.

I believe in him more now than I did then, but I must say that when the full extent of his earlier history became known to me in the last year, I too was shocked. I read all the letters, many times with tears in my eyes. Nevertheless, it gives me even more admiration for the man, because he did not quit his impossible dream. In our shadow lies a gold mine, if we are brave enough to shine a light on it and then digest and learn from what we see, as I believe he has done. No matter how dark we may be at times, we all have the potential to combust our karmic hindrances and flower towards our natural Bodhisattva potential.

We should remember the past so that we learn not to repeat old errors. It's true that among the many transgressions of many teachers, Eido Roshi's history makes a good case study. I for one have no objections to this history being a part of the public record; however, as I have said earlier in this forum, "I have no objection to public debate, even after this long interval, but much of the recently circulated material on the web has been sanctimonious vilification, which will have it's own karmic effect."

This current controversy, over old material, has been and continues to be fanned by four men with old grudges, intent to "bring him down," as one has said directly. By the way, none of the four men I am referring to are members of AZTA, but please be aware that a man who was declined membership in AZTA, in part because Eido Roshi would not acknowledged him as a Dharma Teacher, started the current wave of vilification. I am happy to participate in any AZTA discussion on any topic, but in my opinion no investigation public or private will satisfy these four.

Ethical complications for teachers and students must periodically be reviewed, investigated and propagated. In doing so, case histories are invaluable. When we meet together next month, I have no objection to using the history of the Zen Studies Society as one example of the difficulties encountered in transmitting the Dharma to the West.

With palms together,
Genjo Marinello
Abbot of Chobo-Ji, Seattle, WA

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