



Plum Mountain News

Special Karma

Review by Genjo Osho

I recently finished reading Merry White Benezra's Zen novel of love and folly at a Zen monastery, [Special Karma](#). While reading this book, I was immediately transported to Dai Bosatsu, and though I wasn't there until the 90's, I felt a palpable inner resonance with every nook and cranny of the location and the impact the place and practice had on the people training there. Merry pegged the experience of the place, the practice, and especially the presence of Eido Shimano Roshi. She also captured how isolated and dismal it can be for any residents staying over the DBZ winter break. I can only imagine how bleak it will be for the two female monks planning to stay over this winter's break, and my heart goes out to them.

I find myself still greatly disturbed and betrayed by the fact that Eido Roshi's sexual advances towards students did not end more than 15 years ago, as I was assured they had, when I began to train with him. Indeed, we are all now well aware that his sexual advances, which sometimes even rose to date rape, did not stop. Perhaps the frequency diminished a bit with age, but not because of any real understanding of the harm he had done or was doing right up to the latest exposure in June of 2010 that forced his retirement last year. The book also should help everyone see just how insidious, confusing and detrimental such advances, let alone conquest, can be, not only to the one pursued, but to the whole training sangha, both those who were subtly or actually aware of what was going on, and indirectly to all those who didn't have a clue.

Of course, given Eido Roshi's lack of respect for ethical boundaries in this crucial area, in this arena he was always a poor example to his students. How tragic that such an inspired teacher and leader could have such a big gap in his training and psychological maturity. Clearly his great gifts were repeatedly used to excuse or minimize his great gaps.

It is my sincere hope that the continued dialogue prompted by such courageous and revelatory writing as Merry's will keep pressure on the Zen Studies Society administration to make [the needed organizational reforms](#) that will allow real healing to begin.

