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The more I have studied the first-person testimonials, the NYT's article on Shimano and the ZSS, and Shimano's own public apology and the retraction of that apology, the more troubled I have become. I have been appalled by the extent of the damage, the lack of sincere leadership, the corruption of the institution, and the chronic harm wrought by [Eido Shimano's](#) untreated addiction— enabled by his community. When I have personally attempted to intervene in the Zen tragedy known as ZSS, I have learned first-hand that facing reality was (tragically) not the main practice. Protecting the teacher, the "Dharma," and the opportunity to practice in a monastic and city setting were favored at the cost of the sangha's

(community's) well-being.

Benezra describes the range of attitudes toward the Roshi's inappropriate behaviors—including her own. True to Benezra's description of conversations with monastic members, I have learned from former and current ZSS members that some became convinced that they had an opportunity for enlightenment, and the harm being perpetrated on others was of no consequence. Others were manipulated by their own idealism, unmet needs, sleep deprivation and isolation. The techniques described by Benezra, and also employed by ZSS, bear a startling resemblance to classic cult inductions. Depression and mental instability resulting from ongoing membership, suffered by those who were exposed to this kind of deceptive practice, confirms the potential diagnosis of unwholesome cult-like psychological manipulation. Rather than trying to convince you of this diagnosis, I invite you to study these characteristics as they are outlined on the internet and make up your own mind.

Just as Benezra has enriched the conversation about abusive Zen situations and teachers with her book, a number of Zen teachers have spoken up about the sexually exploitative situation at ZSS. I took the opportunity to write to the ZSS Board of Directors to encourage the organization to remove Eido Shimano from his position and provide authentic healing to all community members harmed by his (apparently) unrelenting sexually predatory behaviors and other unrepentant cruelties. As an empowered Zen teacher of [Rinzai](#) koans and Abbess of my own community, I quoted to the ZSS Board of Directors the Japanese expression: "Water drunk by the cow becomes milk; water drunk by the snake becomes venom." Very much like the Roshi in [Special Karma](#), Eido Shimano is like this metaphorical snake, in effect using ZSS as his breeding grounds and poisoning many well intentioned Zen practitioners with his personal venom— unresolved sexual addiction and predation. Benezra's book helps us to see just how this happens and helps us to continue a public conversation. I do not believe that keeping this "special karma" a secret has helped Zen in the West. In my opinion, the events, their cover-up, and the continuation of harm at ZSS have tarnished American Zen practice. I congratulate Benezra and her book for bringing more attention to the importance of exposing this kind of harm.

[Grace Schireson, Ph.D.](#), Zen Abbess

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