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Posts: 71  
Joined: Mon Aug 30, 2010 5:57 pm  
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christopher:: wrote:

BTW, back on topic-- here's an excerpt from an interview in progress with Merry (author of [Special Karma](#)), which will be made public shortly. (She's double checked this and gave her okay for me to share this here).

*Q. Some of the experiences described in the book must have been very traumatic and I assume you know many others who went through this. Were the consequences the same for most, or did everyone react differently?*

**Merry Benezra:** Yes, everyone's experience and reaction is different. I did not have the full-out sexual encounter with Eido that many women had, so my experiences are different right away, from that perspective. I cannot really speak for anyone but myself.

I went to DBZ with a refuge-taking mind. I was 28 and unmarried. I had concluded a sexually driven affair with an older married man, and, following that fiasco, I became engaged to an available man my age who changed his mind three days before our wedding. The whole sex/marriage thing did not seem to be working for me, did not seem to be my karma, and I assumed that by living in a Zen monastery I would be putting all of that behind me. Having an affair with the teacher wasn't in any way part of my agenda. I didn't know about Eido's reputation until after I had arrived – when I had already, in my mind, burned my bridges back to the material world. I assumed that this was a problem I could handle with one word: No.

I found Eido's advances to be disrespectful and corrosive to my journey as a Zen student. My first two sesshins were marred by this, and I very nearly lost my emotional and psychological bearings during the second sesshin. This was when he told me I had a 'special karma,' and I gradually came to the realization that this special karma of mine had nothing to do with the possibility of grounding myself and my life in Dharma – the only thing I really wanted.

Someone defending Eido (as I tried to do for a while) could say that he found my Achilles heel – my spiritual greed – and attacked me there, in order to help my practice in the long run. But my clear sense of him is that he had no such intention. He wanted sex, as he told me, simply because it could be 'quite enjoyable.' And he chose incredibly inopportune times to suggest this; e.g., during sesshin.

Facing the idea of leaving DBZ and then finally doing so was difficult for me, because I had considered this to be my last stop in life and didn't have any other options in mind. But in fact, once I left I quickly remembered there were other Zen centers, and so I soon moved to San Francisco where I happily lived as a more peripheral than engaged member of the SFZC community for a few years.

I can certainly say that Eido's advances took the heart out of my motivation as a Zen student, and I have been wary of Zen teachers and I suppose the power structure of Zen practice centers ever since. My understanding of Dharma, however, has never wavered.

And then I have to add that DBZ and SFZC were where I found my tribe. As disturbing as Eido's approaches were, discovering community for the first time in my life was extraordinarily healing. My experience was definitely in shades of grey.

I just finished reading Merry White Benezra's novel **Special Karma** today. I was immediately transported to DBZ, and though I wasn't there until later decades, 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 anyone staying 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. I remember being deeply assured by Shinge Roko Roshi and all those who trained with him longer and more intimately than I did that he had reformed. 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 exposé 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 grossly aware of what was going on, and indirectly to all those who didn't have a clue. Of course given Eido Roshi's gross lack of respect for ethical boundaries, he was always a poor example to his students in this crucial area of practice. 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.

I know that Shinge Roshi has made real progress changing the ethos of the practice at DBZ, but it feels so tragic and a kind of personal betrayal to me and others that there has not been a clear edict from her and the board excluding Eido Roshi from the properties. He has demonstrated repeatedly that he doesn't get the harm he has done and therefore unquestionably remains an active sexual predator, the fractured sangha needs his removal to begin to heal, so why hasn't this step been taken? Moreover, given that such harm was perpetuated by the lack of a strong enough board where the Abbot held too much power, why is there such resistance to a fully democratic board where the Abbot is no longer the CEO? An organizational apology has not been forthcoming either, but such an apology would be meaningless, if these two concrete steps have not been taken. Moreover, given the undisputed fact that this severely wounding behavior with inadequate response was continuously going on for decades, where is the outreach and commitment of funds to care for those harmed? Instead the board continues to pay the Shimanos' 70% of their income and fully support their plush condo on the Upper East Side. Yes, there are legal issues, but is it right action? It seems to me the administration could at least admit that under the circumstances that both Shimanos' should have been fired for cause. I know I was a part of letting them "retire," and I now fully regret my participation in this decision.

I also regret my recent highly critical suppositions and suggested motives that I've directed at Shinge Roshi here at ZFI, I know she has done a lot, and she is doing her best under difficult circumstances, but then again, I believe Eido Roshi was also doing his best, which may be hard to accept, but in my view it can be no other way. It is very hard not to make suppositions and suggest motives when crucial organizational actions have not been forth coming. I completely understand the frustration, anger, and sense of betrayal felt by many that more has not been done, as I readily admit to feeling all these things myself. In my own case, this frustration and anger is amplified by the fact that I was abused by my biological father when very young, and even though this was very well known to my mother, she was unable to protect me or stop the abuse until after much psychological damage had been done. I must work to be more careful not to project my anger and sense of betrayal at not being protected back then on Shinge Roshi and the current board. Nevertheless, when Shinge Roshi took on the mantle of Abbot of ZSS, she accepted by default the truth that the "buck stops here." Please no more delays and excuses, the only way to save any of Eido Roshi's gifts is to let the man go, embrace fundamental organizational restructuring, and actively reach out to those harmed and alienated (which won't really be possible until the first two steps are taken). Please see <http://www.zenforuminternational.org/viewtopic.php?f=73&t=3584&start=1500#p110778> for a more exhaustive presentation of needed actions.

With palms together,

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<http://www.choboji.org>