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Kobutsu,

I was a resident and kessei student at Dai Bosatsu Zendo from September 1976 to February 1977. You asked me to describe my experience of sexual harassment by Eido Roshi.

I was new to Zen practice when I became a DBZ kessei student September 1976, having attended Thursday night zazen in the city on a very sporadic basis over the previous few years, and having also stayed at DBZ as a guest/work student for the last two weeks of July 1976. I returned to DBZ in September 1976 for the kessei in a very serious refuge-taking state of mind.


Although I had been warned by Adam Fisher (when we were both summer guest students at DBZ in late July 1976) that there had been a scandal the previous year, it sounded to me as though the problem was the Eido had taken more than one (willing) lover but had not told any of his lovers that their relationships were not exclusive – and then at some point they all found out about each other. I had no interest in being a lover of Eido Roshi's – I had had enough of married lovers when I showed up, and my intention was to move in the exact opposite direction toward sexual abstinence. Nor did Eido strike me as an appealing lover. When he made his initial and rather subtle advances, I did not encourage him.

I was assigned to the position of Assistant Jisha at the beginning of the first 7-day sesshin of Dai Bosatsu's first kessei. This was also my first 7-day sesshin. My entire intention for that first sesshin was to experience kensho. I was sitting very diligently and with tremendous effort toward this goal. After the last sitting on the sixth day, Roshi asked me to meet with him in his study. I assumed (hoped) this had to do with jisha work, but when we sat (kneeling) at the table, he produced a large book of photographs of nude women. He said that a student had recently sent it to him, and proceeded to flip through the pages. He said, "This one is really not so bad," and showed me the photo of a nude young woman straddling a chair backwards. I said, "I think I should go now," and he asked, "Why?" and then clasped my hand. I didn't argue with him – I just stood up and left. The following day, I told him that his behavior was likely to trigger another scandal.

Despite this, Eido made it very clear that he was patiently waiting for me to relent, and he made several more passes. In dokusan in the middle of my second sesshin, he told me that I had a "special karma," and I was so naïve and so committed to practice that I took this to mean I would be his dharma heir. When I realized, and he confirmed, that it meant I was destined to be his lover, I was emotionally and psychologically devastated. I know that Eido labels his accusers as mentally unstable, but actions like this can hardly do otherwise than to destabilize otherwise healthy but koan-stressed and sleep-deprived students in the middle of a Rinzai Zen sesshin. I was never able to complete a sesshin after that.

For me, the experience of being diverted from my path and de-valued as a serious Zen student has had a lifelong impact on my relationship with Zen Buddhism. I do not trust Buddhist teachers of any sect. What I mean by this is that I understand that sexual attractions are part of human nature and that, without very clear and enforceable rules prohibiting teacher-student liaisons in Buddhist practice, this corrosive interaction is likely to play itself out again and again and again. It seems a shame that the standards that psychologists and university professors and lawyers are bound to (and the beneficial atmosphere these standards create), are beyond the scope and reach of so many Buddhist organizations.

With warm regards,

  
Merry White Benezra (Nennen)