

1979

20 Feb Tue

Dear [REDACTED],

I'm writing to you about the situation at Dai Bosatsu and New York Zendo that we're both aware of. I'm sure you feel very much alone in all of this, and I wanted to tell you that you are not.

I experienced quite a bit of sexual "harrassment" from Eido Roshi (from inuendo to proposition) during my stays at DBZ - less during my second stay, I think because of [REDACTED]. The first time it was just a barrage - in dokusan, during sesshin, during a very serious illness Aiho had, etc. For six months I never spoke of it to anyone, and I vigorously denied it to Rinko, who suspected something was up, and to Korin. I wanted to be thought of as a student, and not one of Roshi's women.

Just before I left in February 1977 there was a rather bad incident, not directly concerning me. A very pretty young woman named [REDACTED] arrived as a short-stay student just a few weeks before the beginning of Kessei. She was very upset about some unhappiness in her own life, and was really "taking refuge." She decided to stay for Kessei. Roshi had been away, but the night he came back he propositioned her. She told [REDACTED] about it that night and left the next day. When [REDACTED] asked Roshi why she had left so suddenly Roshi said that she was "obviously hysterical."

I began telling people what had happened to me, but I did not tell very many people, and I asked them to keep it all confidential. I told [REDACTED] and Rinko, but still denied it to Korin. I did not want to rock the boat. After I left I found out, in correspondence with a woman who had been a friend during the first Kessei, [REDACTED], that Roshi had also propositioned her. We had been very close friends and yet we had kept a silence on something that was disturbing us every day, in order to protect the Sangha, the Kessei and the Roshi.

Also you may know that the reason [REDACTED] [REDACTED] did not come up for July Fourth Sesshin was that Eido Roshi made a literal grab for her at NYZ a few days before sesshin.

When I left after the first Kessei, I seriously thought of "blowing the whistle." But I was grateful for the opportunity I'd had to practice at Dai Bosatsu, and I thought that if I said anything it would be the end of everything at Dai Bosatsu. I really thought it would fold the place. Now I realize that it is not so serious. There is a responsibility that falls into other hands: the Board of Trustees', Soen Roshi's and the present abbot of Ryutaku-ji. It's not the end at all. We don't have to protect our paradise. And it must be as accountable as any other kind of group or organization. Our real responsibility is there.

I never did sleep with Eido Roshi, but I let him kiss me good-bye when I left in August. I see him now as just an ordinary human being in this respect - with appetites like anyone, like me or you. He kisses very nicely. I am not against promiscuity generally, and I am not even against his taking lovers within the Sangha, so long as the women know exactly what the situation is. But I think that it should be above-board, as it is for Trungpa Rinpoche. And then, when it is known and admitted, it will be up to the Board of Trustees and the Sangha to freely decide whether or not the situation is acceptable, Perhaps, after all, it is.

Personally, I found his seductions to be very distracting and jarring the first Kessei. I was a very intense and overzealous student at the time and almost needed just such a kick in the pants. Yet I wonder now if I would not have been a better student in the long run without it. I'm nearly not a student at all, now. And last year, during my second stay at Dai Bosatsu, it hurt me that he treated me very distantly for quite a while. When he warmed up it became sexual again. That kind of either/or situation made it very difficult for me (or, I would think, any woman) to be his student. You want his attention and his help, and that, I think, is how it begins. He takes this emotional opening-up, which is normal and right in a spiritual student-teacher relationship, as a sign of sexual readiness.

I don't know why you and I never talked about this - or perhaps we did. One of the problems of Dai Bosatsu is that to warn a new female student that she is likely to be propositioned by her teacher is to risk every new female student leaving in a very big hurry and telling the world. We also were hoping he had slowed down. Since he was very cool to me and did not bother [REDACTED] until after Kessei was over, we thought that he had become more discrete.

As you know, I'm back at [REDACTED] Zen Center. It would amaze you to see it - a normal city sitting draws 40-60 people; it's like sesshin at Dai Bosatsu. Many of the students have practiced steadily for five to ten years, and more, and there are at least 20 priests. The fact that there is a residential/community situation in the city helps make this a strong center, but that is not the beginning and end of it. The students stay, and they mature. Students are the practice; without students there is nothing. I can't help but feel that Eido Roshi has used too many students up, and that soon the situation will be critical. I frankly would feel better if the Sangha would take the responsibility for exposing and ameliorating the situation before it reaches the disaster level. At that point it will all come out anyway. It's not just the women, but the Ed Lindsays and the Tangens, and also the strong students who simply go elsewhere.



The situation at Dai Bosatsu is known by the older students at this Zen Center and I imagine at most others. The precepts are extremely important here, and, though things are not perfect (and yet it is the same problem of giving one's teacher endless and secular power), the infractions are small compared with what has happened there.

You have an enormous responsibility right now, and I urge you to take some time off to yourself and think about it again. The precept of not telling falsehoods is real, and though only monks are sworn to it, we all are bound to it. I'm sure you know this.

I really do worry about you, because I have been told that women who have had love affairs with Eido Roshi have taken painful falls when he has tired of them. He is teacher, father and lover all in one, and it is very hard to give that up. I wish you would be strong and break free of all of this. You can come here - you can go to any Zen center in the country with your strong record of monastic residency, tenzo, etc. What has taken place between you and Roshi will be your own business when you leave. Dai Bosatsu and New York Zendo are not the only harbors in the world - there are many communities, and most of them are quite a bit stronger and healthier. You really have nothing to fear.

I feel very strongly that [REDACTED] has been acting in the best interest of the Sangha, and I know he regrets having had to involve you. The decision to go ahead with this was a difficult one for him, and it was a move he made only after a great deal of soul-searching. He has tried to get in touch with you in order to return your letters and explain his actions to you. I have not read your letters, and I believe that copies of them were only shown to the Board, in confidence. He knew that this would not be pleasant for you, and regrets your discomfort, but he felt that this was the only way to wake the Board up to a persistent problem.

After some hesitation on my part, I decided I would support [REDACTED]'s action and help if I could. It is unfortunate that you are the "man in the middle," but it is a great opportunity for you as well. I'm sure you are furious at [REDACTED]; I would be too in your place. Yet it is out, and perhaps it will be for the best, even for you. I'm in a much safer position than you are now, obviously, but I am going as far out on a limb as I possibly can. I honestly wish I had slept with the man, just so that I could say so, be one person to SAY it, and also so that I could keep you some real company. I've phoned Korin and told him in detail what my involvement with Eido Roshi was, and all that I know about other women, all I know first-hand.

This is not a small thing, [REDACTED], and your decision is crucial. I support you, and I hope you will be strong and, as it comes down to it, heroic. For me, this situation is not so very distant from Jonestown, because it comes down to the same issue of power and accountability within spiritual organizations. If we are so desperate, and fear our teachers so much that we do not dare to call them into account and demand honesty from them, then in my opinion we are individually guilty of what happened at Jonestown, because we are following the same blind path. A very recent article in Harper's magazine on Trungpa Rinpoche's group explores the same theme.

This is, as we've said so often, the infancy of Buddhism in America. We are pioneers. We will set the precedents, and I am very much afraid of what can happen if this precedent fails to be set. Practice centers and religious teachers must begin to be accountable; their own karma will destroy them if they are not.

Even if you do maintain your line I understand and in a sense support you, [REDACTED]. Please call me collect if you want to talk. [REDACTED] (home) or [REDACTED] (work).

With love and gassho,

[REDACTED]

P.S. At [REDACTED] request I am sending him a copy of this letter.