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December 14, 2013

Dear dharma brothers and sisters,

Recently I have been invited to join the Bodhi Board of Directors, and I accepted. However, this letter is solely my responsibility, as a dharma brother.

The confusion swirling around Bodhi and Christiane's situation hinges on our understanding of Roshi's authority. In the email exchanges I have seen there is little recognition of the history of Bodhi. There are significant events in Bodhi's history with Roshi that are relevant to the question of authority. I want to make some things clear.

Roshi resigned as Abbot of Bodhi, and was never reappointed Abbot.

Roshi has claimed authority as the Abbot of Rinzaï-ji to direct the situation at Bodhi. Under law, the Bodhi Board is ultimately responsible for Bodhi, and does not recognize Roshi's claim to be Abbot of Bodhi. The history surrounding Roshi's resignation undercuts any claim of authority. I was an eyewitness to events, and I will share my experience with you. Then you can decide for yourselves.

Roshi has said, "All words are lies." But this does not mean there is no truth in the telling. Retelling personal experience is always a narrative. There is silence between the words; there is silence within the words.

As you may know, Roshi resigned as Abbot of Bodhi in the late 80's. This was the culmination of accusations of sexual misconduct by Karen Tanaka, who was a staff member at Bodhi at that time. Karen died a few years ago, but she wrote a poem about her experiences with Roshi that made it onto the internet. I have

included it after this letter, if you wish to refresh your memory.

At that time I was Acting Abbot of Bodhi. I had gone to Mt. Baldy for seichu when her complaint came to the Board. Roshi sent me back to look into this. In the Board meeting, Karen's complaint was buttressed when a female Board member spoke of Roshi's unwelcomed advances towards her. And this was not the first time I had heard complaints from students about Roshi. The Board was stunned and scrambled to respond. The Board wasn't looking to punish Roshi, but to respond to Karen's complaint and avoid possible legal trouble.

This was reported to Roshi, who promptly flew out to New Mexico. He called for a Board meeting and announced he was resigning. He demanded my resignation, and that the entire Board resign. All of this happened as requested. He appointed Christiane to manage Bodhi and installed a new Board. Karen left the Bodhi, and many Santa Fe sangha members left. Roshi asked me to stay for a year and help Christiane learn the Bodhi; I stayed only to be near my children. Many people suffered, some are still suffering.

For Roshi, he continued to control everything other than Bodhi and the allegation was never addressed. But he did resign from Bodhi; and this is the only time I know of where he has taken responsibility for his sexual actions.

Now, Roshi is asserting his spiritual authority as supreme Abbot of Rinzaï-ji to direct events at Bodhi. The sentiment of the Bodhi Board is that no one who has damaged the sangha, as Roshi has, can claim spiritual authority without explicit recognition by the Board. The Board should not recognize Roshi's putative authority, and should not allow Roshi to unilaterally make decisions without the consent of the Board.

The damage he brought to his sangha cannot be undone. He voluntarily resigned; the Board did not bring any pressure. Roshi told us once, "Buddhist love is responsibility." So, take responsibility!

Over the past year we have learned of the deep pain within and outside our sangha from his behavior. The Albuquerque Zen Center has lost many old students, good people, because of this. The New Mexico sangha has taken another hard hit, and recent announcements from Rinzaï-ji have not spoken to this sangha's concerns. Remember the painful experiences we shared in our January and March meetings? I gave a brief outline of this situation in January. But there were many shared experiences at that meeting. Now they seem forgotten, but those issues are alive in New Mexico.

I intend to hold Roshi to his resignation. This may lead to confrontation and I am sure the Rinzaï-ji sangha will suffer. This is an unnecessary conflict; everyone loses. The sangha's suffering will be on all of us.

The Board is interested in working out an arrangement with Seido to guide the Bodhi for the near future.

And I anticipate the Board will expect Seido to present his vision for Bodhi when discussing his situation. The preservation of Bodhi is the responsibility of the Board. If there is a vision for Bodhi's future, share it. If there is no vision, what is going on?

The relationship between Roshi and Christiane is their business. Christiane has been the leader of Bodhi for over 24 years. She faces some difficult decisions, but these are her decisions, notwithstanding actions by Roshi or a petition of her former dharma brothers and sisters. The Bodhi Board has had no reason to dismiss Christiane, and should properly exercise compassion to see that she is treated fairly.

This could get ugly, but it doesn't have to. Roshi's directives for Bodhi have been honored; but the Board does not recognize Roshi's authority. Roshi's resignation marks the darkest period of Bodhi's history. Roshi failed his sangha and in his responsibilities as Abbot. Why shouldn't the Bodhi Board consider this as we go forward?

Within the sangha, between the signers of the petition, the Abbots, and the Rinzaï-ji Board of Directors you must find the clarity and determination to convince Roshi to let go of his concern about Bodhi. There seems to be plenty of pressing issues all around Rinzaï-ji. Who benefits from further conflict?

This could be contested in court, but to what end? If it goes to court, the media will certainly notice. Who among you will explain to the New York Times the subtle teaching within Karen's poem? It is unlikely that a court will support Roshi's claim. In the end, the Bodhi Board will still have final say.

Roshi had 24 years to change Bodhi before now, and he didn't. He probably could have had himself re-installed as Abbot, but he didn't. In light of everything we have shared over the past year and its impact on the sangha, now is not the time to assert spiritual authority.

Roshi tries to push his way through obstacles, but this one will not go away. In discussions and emails to the BWC and Abbots, I have said we must address our past if we are to truly move forward. The suggestion went nowhere. However, the New Mexico sangha is different. The Bodhi Board is looking at its history as it determines its future.

Gassho,

Seiju

*"Roshi, you are a sexual abuser"*

*" 'Come' you say as you pull me from a handshake onto your lap*

*" 'Open' you say as you push your hands between my knees, up my thighs fondle my breasts*

*rub my genitals*

*french kiss me"*

*"you put my hand on your genitals*

*stroke your penis*

*jack you off?*

*this is sanzen?"*

*"We came to you with the trust of a student*

*You were our teacher*

*You betrayed us*

*You violated our bodies*

*You rape our souls"*

*"Roshi, you are a sexual abuser*

*Your nuns you make your sexual servants*

*Your monks and oshos are crippled with denial*

*Roshi, Sexual Abuser."*

