

From: Brian Lesage <brian_lesage@hotmail.com>
Subject: Sexual Allegations about Joshu Roshi
Date: December 11, 2012 2:12:27 PM EST
To: <sasaki.archive@gmail.com>

In the 1990's I was a monk under Joshu Roshi spending most of my time at Mt. Baldy Zen Center. I am deeply grateful for my time with Joshu Roshi. He opened my spiritual practice of the Dharma up in profound ways which have deeply transformed my life.

AND I have been saddened by the serious harm and hurt that has been caused to the many individuals and to the community as a whole as a result of Joshu Roshi's unskillful behavior. I have also been saddened by the communities' inability to address this issue over the years.

During the fall of 1997, when Joshu Roshi was not at Mt. Baldy, those residing at Mt. Baldy regularly got together to discuss Roshi's sexual behavior with women students and how the community had responded to it over the years. A few of the people who participated were women who experienced various forms of sexual contact with Roshi as well as stories they heard from other women. During this time, I spoke with a number of women (by phone) who shared with me privately their experience of Roshi's insistence on having some kind of sexual contact with them.

We decided to write a letter to Roshi concerning this issue which I have included here. After the letter was given to Roshi, he threatened to resign from Rinzaï-ji. I don't recall the specific words, but what I do recall is that at the end of Rohatsu Dai-Sesshin, one of Roshi's most senior Oshos stood up and said to everyone something like, "If you don't like what's going on here, leave!" I also recall him giving the basic message of "Don't talk about it." Some of the monks of Mt. Baldy decided to move ahead and tell every new female student of the possibility of being groped by Roshi as a way of taking some kind of action.

This is one of the incidents I recall around this issue. May the Rinzaï-ji community address the sexual allegations that are arising in a skillful way.

- Brian Lesage (Kogen)

Kobutsu Malone <sasaki.archive@gmail.com>
To: Brian Lesage <brian_lesage@hotmail.com>
Re: Sexual Allegations about Joshu Roshi

WHO SIGNED THE LETTER?

On Dec 11, 2012, at 2:22 PM, Brian Lesage
<brian_lesage@hotmail.com> wrote:

Hi Kobutsu,

All of the students, and monks who were part of the discussions that I mentioned signed the letter and then we gave it to Roshi.

I hope this helps.

Warm regards,
Brian

Kobutsu Malone <sasaki.archive@gmail.com>

To: Brian Lesage <brian_lesage@hotmail.com>

Re: Sexual Allegations about Joshu Roshi

Their names?

From: Brian Lesage <brian_lesage@hotmail.com>

Subject: Sexual Allegations about Joshu Roshi

Hi Kobutsu,

I signed the letter along with others who I don't feel comfortable, at this time, giving their names without their permission.

I could contact some of them and have them contact you if they are willing. How does that sound?

- Brian

Kobutsu Malone <sasaki.archive@gmail.com>

To: Brian Lesage <brian_lesage@hotmail.com>

Re: Sexual Allegations about Joshu Roshi

I think I'll just go with an explanation.

-Can you write a quick statement as to why the letter is unsigned?

K.

December 12, 1997

Dear Roshi,

We, the undersigned students, monks, and nuns of Mt. Baldy Zen Center, have a deep and abiding respect for you and without exception consider ourselves fortunate to study under you. The practice which you have brought to this country, set-up and run for the last 35 years has changed our lives in ways for which we are profoundly grateful. But out of concern for the well being of the sangha we feel compelled to write this letter, although it is with difficulty that we do so.

With sadness and confusion we have struggled with your sexual behavior toward women. In the past open discussion was discouraged, and people were left feeling afraid to raise their concerns about this matter. But this fall we have been meeting to air our concerns and to try to come to a better understanding of the problem.

We have talked to many of your women students who have told us they suffered for years and suffer still as a result of your behavior. Many of your most serious practitioners have told us that they have been disheartened by this situation. It is clear that both men and women have been hurt, and that the sangha as a whole has been weakened as a result.

Since we regard the sangha as our family, we feel a degree of responsibility for this situation. As such, we think it is necessary to tell new female students of the possibility that you will approach them in a sexual manner. In doing so we hope to provide an environment in which they can express any hurt and confusion that might arise in this regard.

We are aware that this is an issue that may be more appropriately addressed with the sangha as a whole, but we thought it would be best to bring it up directly with you first. We are deeply grateful for your willingness to keep on teaching, but ask that together we make the most of the precious time that remains. Together with you we hope to continue to clarify this matter in order to build a stronger sangha with a stronger practice. We understand our obligation to match your efforts with our efforts and we are prepared to demonstrate our sincerity in the strength of our practice in this winter seichu and in the years to come.

With deep love and respect,