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Subject: Sasaki's misconduct
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To: sasaki.archive@gmail.com

I practised with a Rinzai-ji affiliated group for approximately 10 years in the 1980's. I hesitate to call myself a student of Joshu Sasaki since I only saw him in sesshin 2 or 3 times a year or less. I was never a resident at one of his practise centres. I would see him for a week of sesshin when I could, and that was it. I was never sure if he even remembered who I was from one sesshin to the next. For people like me, he seemed distant, elevated, untouchable.

I don't remember the year, maybe 1989, when our centre received an open letter that a female student had written to Sasaki and then mailed to several Rinzai-ji affiliated zen centres. It was a highly emotional rant on how she could no longer tolerate his groping her and his pulling her hand into his robes for his own excitement.

I was stunned. I had no idea this was going on. Then I heard that it was a common occurrence, that "Everybody Knows..." and I began to hear a whole range of stories. Some women said that they became stronger because of his abuse. I also heard a story that one woman hired a Japanese translator to confront him with her pain because he refused to acknowledge her when she confronted him in English. Apparently he refused to acknowledge the translator.

After this scandal, there were some assurances that Sasaki would be brought in line. Apparently a list of behavioural guidelines was drawn up for him. This is what we were told to reassure us that something would be done. I stayed with my practise group hoping that there would be some healing. I didn't want to abandon my practise family just because times were difficult.

One response was that women students who went to practise with Sasaki were warned that he might behave inappropriately, and that this was not to be seen as a necessary part of his teaching.

I wrote a personal letter to Sasaki expressing my concerns and telling him that I did not feel I could sustain my affiliation with Rinzai-ji if I didn't feel certain that women would be safe with him. I never received a reply although one Osho did ask me about what I had written.

A woman returned to our practise centre after sesshin at Mt. Baldy and described how wonderful she felt when Sasaki gave her a big hug at the end of sanzen. This was about a year after the letter denouncing Sasaki had been received. I no longer had confidence that anything would change, and I left the group.

More than once I heard ordained members of the Rinzai-ji sangha say, "If you have a problem with roshi's behaviour, it's your problem." The implication was that Sasaki had no problems. If you thought he did, that just proved your own lack of understanding.

This was "old news" in the 1980's. It's very sad.

Anka Rick Spencer