

To the Members of the Rinzai-ji Board of Directors:

Jeff Creek  
Sam Landsberger  
Leonard Cohen  
Jack Williamson  
Parham Yeshareem  
Paul Karsten  
Paul Humphries

December 18, 2012

In light of the recent unfolding of events regarding Joshu Sasaki's alleged sexual misconduct, I feel compelled to address the matter in a letter to all of you.

As some of you know, I have been married to Sandy Gentei Stewart for 35 years. Prior to my meeting him, I founded the North Carolina Zen Center. I first became a student of Sasaki Roshi in 1972 and continued until 1985, when I could no longer continue my relationship with him because of my experience of his persistent abuse of power in his efforts to destroy our marriage. Sadly, I was no longer able to practice Zen formally – just to set foot in a zendo was more than I could bear for many years. It was a great loss to me.

I was appalled to read your posting on Sweeping Zen that *implies* this was all news to you: “Concerns have been raised about allegations of misconduct within the Sangha and our organization’s capacity to address these challenges.” Jack Williamson’s statement in an email to Rinzai-ji oshos past and present and the present Rinzai-ji Board of Directors sent December 8, 2012 that “no complaints concerning conduct have ever been brought before the RJZC [Rinzai-ji Zen Center] board” is simply untrue. I am shocked at this level of fabrication.

The Rinzai-ji board of directors was informed by my husband in written form in 1992, and again in the fall 2007, about Sasaki’s sexual exploitation of women. I also know that my husband over time has spoken with some of you at great length about the matter. The Board has either lacked the courage, wisdom, or is in utter ignorance of secular laws on this subject and has not served the Rinzai-ji community well. In my opinion none of you have any business being on the board of this corporation. You have also demonstrated your abject lack of understanding of the effect of Sasaki’s sexual misconduct on the lives of the women involved.

I myself have also been a victim of Sasaki’s unwanted sexual attention, advances, groping, and requests for sexual favors. I have loved Roshi and am grateful for many of his teachings, but it took years for me to become free of the enmeshment and the abuse of power perpetrated by him not just on myself but on my husband and our marriage. To put a stop to his perpetration of abuse of other women, there was a time when I gave serious consideration to filing a lawsuit, but the costs – financial,

emotional, and time – were too extensive. The fact that it would have had to be filed in California rather than in NC also gave weight to my decision to not pursue the issue. The personal cost of bringing this kind of abuse out into the open, as well as the spiritual losses inherent in challenging a revered and powerful leader, are some of the reasons such abuse is allowed to continue for so long without consequence.

As I see it, the fact that all of this is unraveling now is not just because of Eshu's statement on Sweeping Zen. It is because Sasaki has stopped teaching and no longer has power over his Oshos and other students by threatening resignation or expulsion. Most of them – with some wonderful exceptions - have also been guilty of not addressing this issue because they wanted to “finish their training” or because they felt “half baked” and wanted to gain further “spiritual fulfillment” or whatever. Probably some, like some of you, were just too lazy and couldn't be bothered, were unwilling to see the truth, or blamed the victims for the abuse - a common response. Perhaps you were unwilling to upset the status quo.

Well, *I* am bothered. I call on all of you to resign. You have no business being on the Rinzaï-ji Board of Directors – none of you. Do the honorable thing and let some new people deal with this. Your track record does not speak very highly of you. On your way out you could ask Sasaki to resign, since he has not *even now*, fully informed of recent developments, had the courage and prudence to do so on his own volition. I am aware that the Rinzaï-ji by laws do not allow you to force the Abbott to resign, but you certainly can ask him to do so.

I have read that in cases similar to this no lawsuits have been filed when the offending principals (in this case, Sasaki, the boards of the various Rinzaï-ji centers, the Rinzaï-ji Board of Directors, and the ordained persons) have been forthcoming in *admitting their mistakes* and open to do whatever is necessary to facilitate healing of the victims.

I will be watching the developments closely. I am encouraged that the Oshos have agreed to meet with outside facilitators, but I know that it will be a long process before the necessary healing takes place. The Rinzaï-ji Corporation and its board of directors clearly have exposed themselves to legal liability for damages of the victims as a result of Sasaki's misconduct and the board's failure to act.

Susanna Stewart