

# Sexual Complaints About Zen Master Go Back Decades

by Robert Borden

*Jemez Thunder*

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Denkyo Kyozan Joshu Roshi, the 105-year-old Abbott of the Bodhi Manda Zen Center in Jemez Springs, has a long history of complaints about sexual harassment dating back to at least the 1980s, causing many Zen practitioners to leave the Rinzai-ji organization in Los Angeles founded by the Roshi. The North Carolina Zen Center severed its affiliation with Rinzai-ji in 2008.

One man said, "His career of misconduct has run the gamut from frequent and repeated non-consensual groping of female students during interview, to sexually coercive after hours 'tea' meetings, to affairs and sexual interference in the marriages and relationships of his students. Many individuals that have confronted Sasaki and Rinzai-ji about this behavior have been alienated and eventually excommunicated, or have resigned in frustration when nothing changed; or worst of all, have simply fallen silent and capitulated. For decades, Joshu Roshi's behavior has been ignored, hushed up, downplayed, justified, and defended by the monks and students that remain loyal to him."

Another man noted, "Wherever people are in a position of power over other people, it is inevitable that some will use that power to pursue and fulfill their own sexual desires. The Buddha himself was accused of having sexual intercourse with the female ascetics Sundari and Cinca."

A woman who allegedly had a sexual experience with Roshi said, "It's so easy to make someone wrong. I 'suffered Roshi's abuse' and it was the closest I ever got to God." Several other women said that sexual encounters with Roshi were fantastically helpful, healing some sexual problems.

Another woman said, "it seemed to us that 'standing up and saying 'no' to the Roshi' was part of the practice.... I said 'no'; the Roshi asked 'Why not?' I said 'Because I have a boyfriend; Roshi is not my boyfriend.' He smiled, said 'good answer,' and that was the last time he made any attempts. My friend described a similar experience."

Roshi stepped down nine months ago as primary Zen teacher of the Rinzai-ji due to serious illness.

The Mount Baldy Zen Center in Los Angeles will be hosting a meeting the first week of January as a "necessary first step to clarify within our organization what is an extremely difficult and complex issue. We welcome any suggestions or comments that sangha members might have regarding this meeting and the issues to be discussed. Confidentiality is guaranteed. Please email us at [mbzcoffice@gmail.com](mailto:mbzcoffice@gmail.com)."