

## Sex with Roshi

Silly me. I thought I was special. And perhaps that's one of the ways, or the main way, that a predator like Roshi (I'm testing out that way of thinking, of feeling)... perhaps that's one way we keep silent. I don't think he ever told me to keep silent. Except that, of course, one of the rules you are taught at the beginning, is Never Talk About What Happens in Sanzen. Why? That's part of the practice. And the practice is so delicious, so interesting, so unusual, that one feels very grateful, until the other craziness's start getting to you and you run out of there screaming, wondering if it's just because you're too weak, since Rinzai is such a "warrior's way." So, 35-plus years' later of ambivalence, I'm glad it's coming out.

My friend posted as formerinji; she somehow thought we both said no. Maybe she said no the first time; it took me months and months to finally say, "Roshi, get your fucking hands off me!" and true, then, he said, "you good student," and pretty much left me alone after that. Didn't ostracize me, etc. But I HAD NO IDEA that there were many, many others.

It was the mid-70's, I was in my mid-20's. I wasn't a virgin; I had sex with whomever I felt like (having sex with.) But to be in a room with a man who was such an extraordinary teacher, whose talks seemed to blow the top off my head, and whose koan practice was so interesting (how do you realize your true self when... ? you see a tree, or drive your car, or...) and a perfectly good way of showing you how to embrace the world was to be called into the arms of this wonderful old man; ah, to receive a hug from the Roshi.

But the balance of power was so extremely slanted.

And then. The kimonos we wore had the most convenient slit openings under the arm, so convenient, a hand slips in and brushes against a breast. An accident? A little, a little more, a nipple kneaded, oh what on earth does this mean? What does it mean to be aroused by your Zen master?

We have no context for any of this master-student relationship business. At least, I didn't - raised "a"- or even "anti"-religiously. I used to get quite disturbed at how the intelligent, interesting people at MBZC seemed to check their brains (critical intelligence) at the door. And people didn't talk. It was partly that there wasn't much time, that most of the practice was in silence (and that's a good thing, that silence, that ritualized silence which allows you to live with only your own mind.)

But when some poisonous activity is going on, maybe we need to break the silence. Maybe silence all week, then once a week a free session where everyone gets to talk openly about problems, questions, worries. Would I have talked, even then? Probably not, unless I realized that I was not only not unique, but that there were many, many other women who were getting versions of the same thing.

The Inji, of course, is in a unique position for intimacy. She gets him up in the morning and puts him to bed at night, serves his meals, drives him, tries to get him hard, whatever. I had come in charging, full of dharma desire. I had, on a fluke, attended a sesshin in Massachusetts when a professor at U-Mass announced he would be out of class for a week, and if any of us were interested, we might come along. I had been reading about Zen for several years, and sitting on my own, so went along. At the end of a week, I was dazzled and smitten -- with the practice, with the experience, and with the old man who spoke so interestingly. It didn't seem like a cult, because the form was many hundreds of years old, and seemed somewhat independent of the teacher.

I went back to school, but I didn't even last a day. Zen practice was far more compelling. Roshi was on his east coast swing. I quit school, went to the next sesshin in New York. I was still not sure where I wanted to go with this. Then I drove to the sesshin in New Jersey, then the one in North Carolina. I could barely stand, by the end of four weeks of sitting, but I had decided I wanted to go to Mt. Baldy and study with Joshu, Sasaki Roshi. I asked him, he accepted me as a student, and wonder of wonders, said I would be his Inji, his personal attendant, and I thought "holy-moly", I'm going to help this Great Man, I'm going to help him write up teishos, make them and his teaching available for others. I'll learn Japanese. I'll become a translator.

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When my father got into his late 80's, he lost a lot of his inhibitions, and he did some "inappropriate" things with women. I spent a lot of time with him; I loved him, but it was difficult. I liked to have my friends come to visit when I was giving him dinner, so he'd have some company. But one evening, he asked my friend Nancy to stand with her back to him and then gave her what he called a "Jewish hug" (she was, he wasn't) and put his arms around her, from the back, and his hands on her breasts. She laughed it off but I was appalled. I lived in dread that his inhibitions might so disappear that he might make a pass at me, but he never did.

After Nancy, I warned my women friends of his lapses and that they should avoid physical closeness or they risked getting their breasts grabbed or touched. I didn't hate him for it, but I didn't want my friends to be unexpectedly subjected to it -- So I warned them.

But no one warned me, and I doubt anyone in any position of both knowledge and authority ever warned any woman of Roshi's proclivities. [note: I was glad to see one monk's posting that a group of students did warn women at some period; but that was long after I was gone.]

So I'm really angry. I'm glad it's "out." My friend "formerinji" was misinformed—no doubt by me, inadvertently. She stopped him fairly quickly, but it took me many months. Many months 'til I finally said, "Take your fucking hands off me!" and it

was quite difficult to do that, to say such a thing to the person I thought was such a profound teacher.

At that time, I still thought I was in a unique position; I was isolated, I spoke to no one completely honestly.

It felt so special to be Inji. It felt like every one else — or many others — were jealous of that special relationship, since most people never saw him outside of Teisho and Sanzen. How lucky I was, to be on such intimate grounds, to be able to laugh and talk with him. But what was I, his Inji, his “personal attendant?” We heard how in Japan, it was the job of a very senior monk. So that puffed us up.

To reject his advances, I had to overthrow all the pressure of every loving Zen student, and my own desire to please this Great Man.

I remember having the thought, (mostly as a joke) watching myself have the thought: “this is America (I knew nothing else, then); if you fuck a rich man, you get money, if you fuck a politically powerful man, you get some kind of power..... what happens if you fuck an enlightened man?” because these thoughts do careen around the brain, in spite of ourselves... (and money and power had never interested me so much.)

I am angry with myself for not speaking out sooner, I’m furious with the Rinzai-Ji establishment for not reining him in; and, believe it or not -- it’s still so very hard to be angry with Sasaki Roshi, even now. The thing I’m most angry about is that I feel like a victim now, and I don’t want to feel that way.

Now that I see a broader picture of the historical pattern of Sasaki Roshi’s behavior, it is deeply insulting and distressing to think that I came to a Zen center, a Zen teacher, for spiritual training, I was given what I thought was a special position, (because of my deep dedication,) but I was a disposable sex object.

I did not, absolutely did not get that I was one of a crowd. Silly me, I thought I was special. But we didn’t talk about it. NO ONE talked about it. I never remember ever hearing anyone talk about it until much later. Even then, I had NO IDEA how excessive it was, that it wasn’t a few, or a dozen, but hundreds. IF I had known, if anyone had warned me, my response would have been completely different.

You’re in such an altered state -- sleep-deprived, in a wholly new and strange atmosphere, in a group of people you don’t know, with a powerful and deeply charismatic leader -- this is the very definition of cultic abuse, yet I couldn’t see it, and it’s still very difficult to realize it.

After I knew that I wasn’t the only one, but before I had any idea how widespread it was, when I was still at Mt. Baldy, I started to hear the men, the monks, make

knowing cracks -- I used to say, to think, "I wonder what their response would have been if he were gay?"

What must it have meant for the men, whose wives and girlfriends were in this situation? How emasculating was that? How humiliating? I have heard that among some kinds of herd animals, only the alpha male gets any sex at all. The Rinzai herd allowed the men sex, it seems, as long as they didn't object to the alpha male's actions.

(I have not heard anyone suggest in all the postings on all the boards over the last month -- Did the men expect that if they became leaders in the organization, or actual successors, that they would have the same kind of sexual access to women? Was that notion floating around in their minds the way "sex with enlightened men" floated around in mine? And has that, in fact, come to pass at the offshoot Zen Centers?)

But I didn't talk about my experiences, because I didn't "get" how widespread it was -- and also because I soon left, primarily for other reasons, sick of other forms of cultish behavior.

But also, I didn't talk, because I still thought he was a great teacher, and I didn't want to harm him, or the Zen Centers -- and I didn't want to deprive others of his teaching & the practice -- and because I could not allow myself to see myself as his victim.

For years I didn't talk about it. (Zen Practice, and my experience at the Zen Centers, let alone the sex.) I didn't mention that I'd spent two years at Zen centers, or if I did, I was uncomfortable talking about it... Too hard to explain; later, I got lazy, and I did tell people. They all seemed to have their own ideas about what that meant, and were sufficiently impressed. And I was and am still glad that I had the opportunity to experience that practice. Is that crazy?

You come into this practice, not really having any idea what it will be, and it's so amazing, the zazen, the teishos, the "heavenly choir" of harmonics during chanting... the struggles and satisfactions and frustrations. Then in Sanzen one day, while you're trying to "manifest yourself as..." trying to "become one with ..." he opens his arms and indicates you should come and receive a hug and it seems like a holy act, a merging of tree and earth, of mother and child. Then that becomes an almost routine part of Sanzen, but it always seems a miracle. Then-- oh, those convenient robes, with the convenient slit under the armpit -- then once, his hand brushes your breast, and you're dumbfounded. And on, and on.

He tells you, "Japanese believe that if old man has sex with young woman it make him strong "(or potent, or whatever.) You say, "Roshi, here, in America, we go to sex therapist." He laughs but does not stop.

Once when driving him and Leonard Cohen to dinner, then sharing dinner with these two stars, he offered me to Leonard, who seemed somewhat taken aback, and embarrassed in his refusal.

A friend tells me that I told him once that Leonard had said to me, in another context, "You think he's such a nice old man, but he's a monster," but I can't remember that now, though I believe it's true that he said that. You can't remember everything.

Not that I'm anti-sex, not that I think Zen teachers shouldn't have sex, ever; I wouldn't even want to make a universal rule about no sex with students, (though that's the easiest thing), because people fall in love. But falling in love, or an occasional relationship, is not the same as trying to have sexual contact with most of your female students.

I had friends who were ex-students, a few who still practiced. Over the years, we talked with nostalgia, agreed it was compelling, but that we wouldn't go back. Life at Mt. Baldy was incredibly macho: "my practice is better than yours," "my practice is tougher than yours." And there was no sense that other teachers or practices were comparable. 'My guru is better than yours.' I think that was one reason there were fewer women than men: they were either too smart for that, or too weak (ah, I was so tough; and I grew up in a time where I thought it was a complement to be told that I thought "like a man." )

We were convinced -- and Roshi emphasized this -- that he was the only real teacher around, the rest were just wimps. Oh, weren't we special!

But in talking with my old friends, the other ex-Zen students, I never was really explicit about the sex.

I could never reconcile the conflicting experiences I had; I could never figure out if Roshi's sexual trips were "a teaching method," or just really fucked up. Or did I owe him the responsibility of privacy I would owe to any other lover?

And. It wasn't all one way, it felt like a kind of love, there was some mutuality. I am still convinced there was a lot of genuine affection in both directions. He was the first person to make me come with his hand. (I remember thinking, how the hell did he learn that??? But I couldn't bring the reality of it into consciousness -- that he must have had a lot of practice, somewhere.) At some point it was just too — too creepy, too yucky -- to have this 70-year-old body pressed up against my 26 year old one.

It's complicated. I can't think of anything in my life that's been more complicated than my relationship with and feelings about Sasaki Roshi, MBZC, and Zen practice.

Yet I can see in my mind's eye, a terrifying, glimmering image like from "Lord of the Flies," an image of feral children gathering around a wounded animal, kicking it to death. I can feel blood lust I never knew rising in me, fueled by my anger. None of this is simple.

We have no context for the "master-disciple" relationship in this country.

Ten or fifteen years ago, I saw Sasaki Roshi for the first time since leaving the practice. He said to me, "You teach me ho-e-ny" .... What? "You teach me ho-e-ny." Oh, a joke, I'd taught him the word, "horny" -- I'd called him a horny old man, to his face. So, he remembered me, 20 or 25 years on, was that a vindication? Is that the thing I wanted to be remembered for?

*Seeing it in print has made it seem real. Seeing people come forward. I don't know Eshu Martin, he may be as fucked up as some of the anonymous posters claim. I don't care; I'm grateful that he started this, and I'm grateful for the others that have come forward.*

Maybe, just maybe, just as I didn't want to be touched sexually by my father, whom I loved; maybe I shouldn't have been touched by that other man, that Zen master.

## **Sex with Roshi, Part II**

First, thank you to: Eshu Martin, Adam Tebbe, Stephen Wilder, Susanna and Sandy Stewart, Giko David Rubin, Brian Lesage, Shari Young, James Green, especially, and many others, for speaking out, and giving me the courage to do so.

Thanks to all the others who have worked on this issue:

To Stuart Lachs, who has written several excellent scholarly articles on problems in Zen communities and with Zen masters, and who, with Vladimer K., put together the astounding "The Aitken-Shimano Letters";

to Christopher Hamacher, "Zen Has No Morals!" - The Latent Potential for Corruption and Abuse in Zen Buddhism, as Exemplified by Two Recent Cases;

to Stephen Batchelor, <http://sweepingzen.com/buddhism-and-sex-the-bigger-picture/>

to Kobutsu Malone, for the Shimano Archive, and the Sasaki Archive Project, And to many others, including the sex worker who wrote that rape is not the end of the world, and not all traumas are equal:

From <http://thenewinquiry.com/essays/live-through-this/>

Live Through This  
By CHARLOTTE SHANE

Now, after another 50 or more hours of research, reading virtually everything that has been written about Sasaki Roshi's ---- what? His what? His "peccadillos"? His sexual rottenness? After reading all the posts, replies, and cross-posts, I started looking at other web sites, which talked about other Zen masters' sexual escapades (that's much too cute a word; at their abuse, their sickness, their psychopathology: for what else explains behavior which is so utterly un-compassionate?)

And further, reading about sexual and psychological (because it's always psychological as well as sexual) abuse amongst the Tibetan llamas, and amongst religious leaders of every stripe: now I see the commonalities, I see how very common and ordinary was what I experienced. I was just like the other "smart people" I complained about at the Mt. Baldy, I "checked my brains (critical intelligence) at the door."

*Now I'm finally getting really angry at Roshi.*

No matter the kid-in-the-candy store he must have felt, coming to 60's America after a life time in Japanese monasteries: How could he not have learned that what he was -- doing was very harmful? How could he not have seen that?

The ordinariness of my situation, the banality of it; I was just another sucker, another dumb cunt. What else was I to a man who would "offer" me to his friend, Leonard? What does that really say about him, and about what he thought about me? And how did I not run out of that restaurant screaming?

I've gone through denial, for 35+ years, and now, suddenly, shame, embarrassment, and livid anger, and I think I'm approaching acceptance -- I was just another sincere and hopeful person, who got nailed by someone who, whatever positive qualities he may have had, miss-used his position of power.

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And yet. A few years before meeting Sasaki, my best beloved had died, very young, in a car wreck, which also had shattered my body. My grief was boundless. (Some might say I was vulnerable.) Roshi said, "Dedicate your chants to dead boyfriend," and that was a good and helpful thing for him to say, and for me to do.

And I, too, needed the warmth of human physical contact.

I would wake him in the morning, at 2:30, and he would open his arm, lift the covers, and gesture for me to come in. (But if I had known, then, what I know now, I don't think I would have.)

And more, tawdry details: He was almost completely impotent. So I felt sorry for him, too, and suggested a sex therapist, but he didn't like that idea. I suppose he knew the monks would find out; then would he seem less in their eyes? (I will stop using what had become a term of endearment, "roshi" "the rosh" -- just Sasaki now.)

I keep trying, now, to remember, what was it really like then, not what does any other person tell me I should have felt. And what does it really feel like now, now that I know?

Now: incredibly disappointing, even after all these years. The confusion is mostly gone, and with it the sense that I lost something in leaving the Zen center, the Sasaki version of Zen practice. It was right to leave; it was self-protection from a sexual and emotional predator.

I saw a poem once, perhaps in the 90's, that a young woman from the Vancouver Zen center had circulated, titled, "Roshi, you are a Sexual Abuser," or close to that. I wish I could remember who showed it to me. I read it, was affected, but still did not fully relate it to my own experience. If I, who was so peripheral to the Zen centers, saw it, then of course the establishment must have also seen it.

The public attitude that "we knew nothing" is DISGUSTING. Shame on you. The Sasaki Archive even now (December 2012) shows several statements going back to the 1970's by MoCs (Monks of conscience), clearly stating their experiences and concerns.

### **The Lie**

The most important thing for me is the Lie. A sin of omission implicit in my behavior. For 35 years, I lied, (by not talking about what had happened,) and that lie and the perceived necessity for it, poisoned everything about experience of the Zen center and with Sasaki.

So the only important and relevant truth is that I had sexual contact, almost daily, for many months with Sasaki. The rest of my writing is my emotional reaction to realizing the context in which that took place: the context of sexual abuse by an irresponsible and probably sociopathic predator.

I can't go back in time and undo what happened to me. But I can put this out here, so that maybe the board and monks will chose to do the right thing and put safeguards and policies in place so this doesn't happen again.

I doubt there has been any effort made to contact ex-Zen students, to get a fuller picture. It was a freak accident that I found out about the Sweeping Zen story by Eshu Martin. I had been away from Zen Center practice since some time in 1977 or



'78. I have seen a few active Rinzai students, a few times, over the years, but I've had far more contact with ex-students, and it's one of those who sent me the info.

The Zen Center, those responsible now, must make strong, serious, and sincere attempts to reach as many of Sasaki's victims as possible. Because I can see how very good it has been for me to speak the truth, how the weight of 35 years of lies (who knew they were so heavy?) lifting off me is everyday making me feel freer and more at peace. Just speaking out has done that, speaking out to myself and to the larger Zen community; though it was a frightening, and distressing thing to contemplate. I kept my feelings hidden from myself as well as others.

Did it cripple me for life? Did it make me unable to function? No, but that isn't really the point, is it? Just because I wasn't so fragile, doesn't make it right or appropriate.

I can hear the monk's inner dialog -- "roshi's different, he can fully manifest with many different individuals, so he's really one with you." Great. Feed it to yourself, if you want, if you still have to -- but just look at the numbers.

There were plenty of other problems; the sexual is just so obviously fucked-up that it can stand in for all the bizarre, manipulative things.

**"Another Former Inji"**