

## On Authority by Alan Hozan Senauke with Jan Chozen Bays and Grace Myoan Schireson

When ongoing questions of misuse of sexuality or power unfold in a spiritual community, it is rarely a matter of one person's actions. Reading through the painful and heartfelt accounts documenting Joshu Sasaki's sexual relationships with students at Rinzaiji down through the years, we see how, knowingly and unknowingly, the community was drawn into an open secret, and people's ability to practice the dharma suffered. Despite individual and collective attempts to address boundaries, repentance, and rectification, these behaviors appear to have continued over more than four decades. We have reports that those who chose to speak out were silenced, exiled, ridiculed, or otherwise punished.

Understanding that our practice is to bear what is unbearable and not to turn away from reality, how could this be so? We suggest it has something to do with a view of spiritual authority and "enlightenment" that we in the West have created in the name of Zen. To be fair, this is not just a problem of Zen. It arises in various Buddhist communities, and more widely in other religious congregations. We are unfortunately susceptible to enthrallment, which is hardly "seeing things as they really are." There are certain problems that may arise when one sees a teacher as comprehensively enlightened and fails to deal with the certainty that he or she, like oneself, has a shadow or deluded aspect. We imagine that "enlightenment" is separate from or outside of ourselves. The community may attempt to protect the teacher, the seeming embodiment of enlightenment. If we hold such a model, it is often impossible to recognize or admit that there has been an abuse of power. We fear the loss of our enlightened teacher and thus the opportunity to become enlightened ourselves.

In the "Kalama Sutta" (AN III, 65 in the Pali Tripitaka) Shakyamuni Buddha offers the Kalama clan clear standards for discernment of what is wholesome and unwholesome. This teaching has been described as "the Buddha's charter of free inquiry."

Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; nor upon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor upon surmise...nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monk is our teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; these things are without blame; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken and observed, these things lead to benefit and happiness," enter on and abide in them.

The collective integrity of the early *sangha* depended on the individual integrity and spirit of free inquiry held by each monk, nun, and community member. Twenty-five hundred years later we would be wise to value this standard. Enlightenment is not a commodity or an end state that justifies unwholesome or harmful behavior. Realization is an ongoing activity. As the Buddha said, "These things are good; these things are without blame...these things lead to benefit and happiness." We need to return to common sense. We can consult with our own hearts, with our friends, and — hopefully — with our teachers. In the midst of our passion for practice when someone says they've been harmed we need to stop and listen carefully. Beyond all lines of authority, devotion, and enthrallment with the dharma, the essence of the Buddha's precepts is to see that we are fully accountable to each other. Teacher and student stand on the same ground. One may see more deeply or more widely, but all beings are equally Buddha. As Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we must try to prevent harm to anyone.