

January 11, 2013

Open letter to our fellow practitioners and the American Buddhist community

Recently there has been the allegation of long-term sexual misconduct by Joshu Sasaki Roshi, as well as the inability on the part of the senior practitioners to appropriately address the problem.

Sadly, we cannot deny these accusations. This issue has been a sore on the body of our Sangha for decades, and we are eager and relieved to finally open it to the light of day.

The Rinzai-ji community of practitioners has struggled with our teacher Joshu Sasaki Roshi's sexual misconduct for a significant portion of his career in the United States. Senior members of our community have made several earnest and serious attempts over the years to correct this problem. Ultimately, these attempts failed. Our hearts were not firm enough, our minds were not clear enough, and our practices were not strong enough so that we might persist until the problem was resolved. We fully acknowledge now, without any reservation, and with the heaviest of hearts, that because of our failure to address our teacher's sexual misconduct, women and also men have been hurt, women and men who trusted us with their Zen practices, and whose trust we failed to honor in a fundamental way.

Joshu Sasaki Roshi is no longer teaching. Senior members of our organization have been busy the past year crafting a document that outlines how our community will move forward without him. A key portion of this document is being dedicated to an ethics policy to ensure that the kind of misconduct that we failed to address properly in the past will not occur again—and will be dealt with properly and swiftly if it does. Although we sincerely believe that Sasaki Roshi's teachings have helped a great number of people, and we are profoundly grateful that he brought us this deep and meaningful tradition, clearly we have been doing something fundamentally wrong if harmful behavior could continue for so many years.

It is our deepest and sincerest intention that in directly addressing the issue here, we can begin to contribute in some small way to the larger discussion in American Buddhism about how to manifest the dharma without deceit, dysfunction, unhealthy power imbalances, inappropriate sexual relationships, and, ultimately, the heartbreak that results from all of the above.

Most importantly this means reaching out to those who have suffered from this problem, and doing everything we possibly can to help them heal. As the first step on a long road, we are forming a Bearing Witness Council that will confidentially receive the stories of the women who are hurting, and work with them to move toward healing. (Information about this will be available soon at rinzaijioshos.org.)

Furthermore, as practitioners tasked with teaching the dharma, we must take a look at ourselves, and the way we relate to each other, and at the question of power in our community, with fresh and unyielding eyes. It is our profound and immediate responsibility to make sure that this problem never happens again in our community. Our job now is to face our failures with humility and a firm commitment to change, and as a start, we bow our heads low in apology and ask for the forgiveness of those whom we have hurt over the years through our neglect.

Nine bows,

The Osho Council of Rinzi-ji