



JOSHU SASAKI STILL IN CONTROL OF RINZAI-JI SAY INSIDERS

Posted by: Adam Kō Shin Tebbe January 4, 2014 [Leave a comment](#)



Sweeping Zen

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More laundry today, I'm afraid.

Last week, I started reaching out to some folks in Joshu Sasaki's lineage to confirm some reports I'd been receiving about ongoing issues within the organization. These reports, in part, suggested that Joshu Sasaki has recently declared himself "Supreme Abbot" of the organization and is effectively still running Rinzai-ji. Seiju Bob Mammosser Osho — of the Albuquerque Zen Center — confirmed this for me, stating that Sasaki remains "firmly in charge" and has assumed another title. Readers of this website will know why this is of concern; if you've just discovered this story, however, you can start reading about it here and here and here. In summary, there is a well-documented history of serious ethical and sexual misconduct on the part of Sasaki, as well as a history of the Rinza-ji community inadequately addressing those behaviors.



My source told me that Sasaki was trying to disrobe Hosen Christiane Ranger of her Osho status, further supporting the news that Sasaki is still in charge. The reason given by Sasaki appears, from the outside, to revolve around her having used the term kessei regarding a retreat offering. Apparently, within Rinza-ji, use of certain terms by Oshos is prohibited when offering retreats at their respective centers.

Sasaki still has many supporters are Rinza-ji, and there is a petition being sent around among that group demanding that Hosen comply with Sasaki's orders — something which remains a question mark. The Bodhi Manda Zen Center Board, however, does not agree with Sasaki's decision or the petition being circulated currently. "The relationship between a teacher and disciple cannot easily be assessed by a third party," said Seiju. "With or without robes, I do not feel that it is appropriate that she be asked to leave Bodhi for the stated reasons. The Bodhi Board of Directors will support Hosen as she decides what to do."

It should be noted that I tried to reach out to Hosen for comment but did not receive a reply. Seiju was able to confirm for me the veracity of the things I had been learning about, though he was reluctant to say too much:



"This is a very dynamic time for the Rinza-ji sangha and I am reluctant to discuss details while everything is in flux. I'm not sure sharing information now is helpful for the Rinza-ji sangha. The five points you mentioned in your email are generally correct, as I understand things. How the sangha responds to these developments is crucial, and my concern centers around the sangha stepping up and taking responsibility for their future. Others in Rinza-ji may see things differently. For now I am reluctant to discuss these matters further. I trust you can understand my concern."

Recently, I had also learned that Eshin Godfrey Osho, who became administrative Abbot of Rinza-ji in March of 2013 (about four months before Sasaki officially stepped down), had recently resigned his position as Abbot in Los Angeles. He was supposed to have been taking over the organization to lead it in the aftermath of the public disclosures of abuse. When I contacted some members of the AZTA inquiring about it, they had not heard about it yet, though eventually I was pointed to a news item by Eshin at his website confirming this. Citing visa, health and marriage as primary reasons, Godfrey does not seem to indicate his resignation has anything to do with these other developments. I contacted Godfrey last week about this story, but he was attending a funeral for his sister in Europe at the time.

During all of this, I was curious to check in with An Olive Branch run by Rev. Kyoki Roberts, OPW, of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh.

According to its website, An Olive Branch aims for the following:

- To proactively address conflict, we offer dispute resolution training and help organization design ethical governance procedures.
- To respond in the midst of disruptive conflict, we provide organizations with processes for healing and restoring harmony.

"An Olive Branch brings the calming influence of a neutral third party, inspired by the tradition of Buddhist teaching that stretches over 2500 years."

Rev. Roberts was unable to answer the majority of my questions for her, citing confidentiality. All that she did provide me with was a paragraph from her contract with Rinza-ji, which states:



Scope of Work

The general purpose of this project is two-fold: first, and primarily, An Olive Branch will serve as first receivers of complaints from people who claim to have been harmed and, secondly, to advise the Bearing Witness Group and the subsequent Listening Council with regard to related issues or questions that may arise in the implementation of the project including responses to particular reporters' requests.

It's very difficult getting anyone to speak openly about Joshu Sasaki and the current activities of Rinza-ji. Responses tend to be very short and public transparency is wholly lacking.

It must be hard for those who have practiced with Sasaki for all of these years to not merely be deferential and loyal to him. It reminds me of what happens when I try to focus on an object that is too close to me, becoming blurry and fuzzy. I have to take a step back and then I can actually see what I am looking at.

A part of me understands the human need to belong somewhere, to have a family. Another part of me wants to scream as I think of all the reports we published here at the website regarding the great harm this man has caused to some of the women who came to him for training, only to find inappropriate touching and unsolicited groping in the interview room. How is this Zen Buddhism or Great Compassion? I just shake my head anymore. It's deeply sad to me that the organization appears unable to disaffiliate themselves with someone who has terribly misused their position as their spiritual head — though, maybe in time.

I remember talking last year to a woman who practices at Rinza-ji and how she said that when she met Sasaki, she knew he could see right in to her. She was still on the fence about what everything means in light of all of the disclosures, though overall I think she still adored the man. I didn't say it then, but I wanted remark on how dangerous it is for us to believe someone sees in to us like that. Personally, I find it to be a projection. We all long to be known, to feel an intimacy with someone that goes beyond words. But what I saw in her eyes was dangerous, with a glowing hero worship look emanating from them. I got the feeling she revered him as one might revere a God, and remembered a man in a video on Sasaki no longer on YouTube who compared Sasaki to Bodhidharma.

I guess I missed the stories of Bodhidharma groping women, as Chizuko Karen Joy Tasaka wrote about in her poem to Sasaki.

This is probably a good place to stop.

Based on reports I was able to confirm, Joshu Sasaki remains in charge of Rinza-ji.