



Rinzai-jī Zen Center

Dear Friends,

Warm greetings from the Boards of Directors and Administrative Abbots of Rinzai-jī and the Mount Baldy Zen Center.

As you may know, we are in a time of transition. We'd like to use this opportunity to connect with you and share some of the work that different members of our sangha have undertaken this past year. Our current challenges are serious, but we see them as an opportunity to acknowledge mistakes we've made in the past, while carrying the best of this practice into the future. We deeply appreciate your patience, input, and support as we continue to find our footing, grow clear in our vision, and mature as trustworthy and capable leaders.

BEARING WITNESS PROCESS

When allegations of improprieties within Rinzai-jī arose in November 2012, a group of three volunteers within the organization (Eshin Godfrey, Myosho Ginny Matthews, and Gento Steve Krieger) met to bring sangha members together to discuss how to respond. Joshu Sasaki Roshi contributed funds to provide for an outside facilitator for meetings and other associated costs. Two meetings were held at the Mount Baldy Zen Center in January and March of 2013, and were moderated by Wendy Egyoku Nakao, of the Zen Center of Los Angeles.

Following these meetings, and on the recommendation of the Bearing Witness Group, the decision was made to hire An Olive Branch to receive reports from individuals who expressed that they were harmed while practicing with Rinzai-jī and its affiliated centers. In May 2013, a contract between the Mount Baldy Zen Center Board of Directors and An Olive Branch was finalized. Funds to pay An Olive Branch were provided by Joshu Sasaki, Roshi.

The Bearing Witness Group was formed at the January meeting at MBZC. Members included Myosho Ginny Matthews, Seiju Bob Mammoser, Hosen Christiane Ranger, Ginsei Ginger Calloway, Myokyo Judith McLean, and Seido Larry Clark. This Bearing Witness Group selected members of a Listening Council, whose job is to provide a group within Rinzai-jī for reporters of harm to be heard, to make requests and to make suggestions. These requests and suggestions are given to the Transitional Leadership Team and administrative Abbots for resolution.

As of the date of this report, the following reports of harm were received by An Olive Branch and sent to the Listening Council for a final resolution. A total of 9 different callers have reported individually to An Olive Branch. One additional reporter of harm called An Olive Branch, requesting information about the members of the Listening Council and asking how to refer any individuals to An Olive Branch.

Of the 9 callers directly contacting An Olive Branch, two calls were from individuals who experienced distress on reading allegations of Sasaki Roshi's sexual misconduct on the Internet. They were provided listening by the Listening Council and felt sufficiently resolved. They did not report harm of a sexual nature from Sasaki Roshi or from others within the sangha. One individual made a report of perceived homophobia within the sangha, asked to speak to a specific osho and was referred to that osho. Three individuals made anonymous reports that were not specific in nature and with which the individuals decided not to proceed. One individual made a report regarding other reporters of harm, was a former member of the sangha and was provided listening by members of the Listening Council. The last two reports were made by individuals who did not feel harmed by Roshi, but felt harmed by the sangha in general and/or specific oshos. They had specific recommendations for changes in practice formats. These specific suggestions included listening circles and healing circles for reporters of harm. Other suggestions included changing the practice of Rinzai-jī to be more inclusive of women, to provide women with leadership positions and to have monthly *sange* (repentance) ceremonies.

To date, An Olive Branch has been paid \$10,282.50 from the funds allotted for this service. There have been no reports since October and no billing since the end of September. Rinzai-jī, the Mount Baldy Zen Center, the Bearing Witness group, and the Listening Council members continue to remain completely open to this process for as long as necessary.

TRANSITIONAL LEADERSHIP TEAM

The Transitional Leadership Team (TLT) was elected by sangha members present at a meeting at the Mount Baldy Zen Center in March, 2013. These members included Myosho Ginny Matthews, Oren Beth Schaffer, Koshin Susan Crozier, Eshin John Godfrey and Gento Steve Krieger. Ginsei Ginger Calloway was then added to this team after the July meeting because of her role as the administrative Vice Abbess of Rinzai-jī. The TLT was elected to be a transitional leadership team until governance procedures could be established for a period of at least one year.

The functions of the TLT included: 1) facilitating communication within the sangha, 2) holding the ongoing work of the Bearing Witness Group, and 3) planning future meetings. Additional responsibilities included identifying and prioritizing other areas that need attention, and organizing one or more listening circles of the sangha.

Once the decision was made to hire a neutral party, An Olive Branch, to listen to reporters of harm, the TLT was charged with oversight of the process. After a contract was finalized between the MBZC Board of Directors and An Olive Branch, the TLT composed letters to explain the process of accepting reports of harm and gave them to the Zen temples and temple heads for distribution. Additionally, the TLT composed press releases to well-known Buddhist publications that were released in order to inform the public of how to contact An Olive Branch.

The TLT organized and steered a meeting of the sangha in July 2013. Prior to the meeting and in anticipation of maximizing benefits for various needs of the sangha, the TLT extensively researched the use of professional consultation, including facilitation, and met with and talked to potential consultants. During this meeting, Eshin Godfrey and Gento Krieger resigned from the TLT due to their new roles as administrative Abbots of Rinzai-jī and the Mount Baldy Zen Center, respectively. Dokan Charles Martin then joined the TLT. TLT members have been working with other members/sangha leaders to plan a future meeting at Rinzai-jī.

ETHICS POLICY

Through the initial work of the Bearing Witness Group, Rinzai-jī is currently completing an ethics policy using the Five Bodhisattva Precepts, which serve as our guide along the path of right speech, right conduct, and relationships. The goal is to nurture an atmosphere where practice can take place without fear or distraction, where dharma comes first.

We acknowledge that difficulties may arise among members related to power differences. Differences in race, gender, sexual orientation, and physical disability require particular awareness and sensitivity. When completed, this ethics policy will provide the broad principles for how our sangha will integrate the precepts in coping with conflicts and ethical issues. It also establishes a Sangha Resolution Council, guidelines for relationships within the sangha (including teacher/student relationships), and a policy for the resolution of grievances.

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We hope that this brief report gives you some idea of the work we're doing, and of the direction that we're going as a community. This is not a comprehensive overview of everything that is happening in our sangha right now; rather it's our first attempt to create a channel of communication between those of us who have administrative and teaching roles within Rinzai-jī and Mount Baldy, and our community of practitioners. As we grow and evolve in this New Year, we will provide regular updates on the effort we're making to acknowledge the past, embrace the present, and move forward.

We deeply appreciate you joining with us in the effort to sustain and cultivate a setting for the practice of Tathagata Zen. This is our mission, and it will thrive only with your continuing support.

Gassho,

Rinzai-jī Board of Directors: Paul Humphreys, Elisa Atwill, Sohan Noan Youngelson, Ginsei Ginger Calloway, Gento Steve Krieger

MBZC Board of Directors: Mark Byers, Bill Flynn, Sohan Noah Youngelson

Rinzai-jī Administrative Abbot: Gento Steve Krieger & Vice Abbots: Ginsei Ginger Calloway, Sohan Noah Youngelson

MBZC Administrative Abbot: Dokan Charles Martin