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Sadly liberating

I was a (gratefully) failed lay student of Roshi Sasaki at Mt. Baldy Zen Center from 1971-1983. During those years I always took the silent, no eye-contact atmosphere as part of the typical ego-busting regimen one was to expect from what can arguably called an anachronistic and ethnocentric machine of monastic-style Zen training, shrouded in Eastern mists, further obfuscated by a foreign tongue.

As years passed, and I began to see that Zen, though a powerful vehicle, can sometimes be an incomplete one, allowing for the walling off and denying/fragmenting parts of the individual psyche. The Mt. Baldy setting back then seemed to attract a type of Westerner that somehow learned to thrive behind that sanctioned form of non-communication. I recently heard the term "Zen Nazis" in reference to stereotypical American practitioners and was at once transported back to those days at Baldy.

I can't personally attest to this roshi's proclivities, and obviously don't need to. Had I found viable footing at Baldy and taken vows all those years ago, I'd like to think that, clarity affording itself, my personal sense of morality, and sense of agency would have compelled me to abandon this particular teacher (after a few appropriate phone calls and letters).

This seems really to now be about complicity, or pedestals, or both, or the individual and collective uncertainty within *Rinzai-ji* as to direction. Not a joiner or follower in this life I can only imagine what it must be like inside for those individuals who devoted years and decades to an imagined higher calling, only to become aware, perhaps gradually, that they were party to a growing scandal. What would I do? Rationalize it away? Justify it? Attempt to stay loyal to what remains of a poisoned sangha and affect damage control from within?

I'd like to think I'd get off my enlightened ass, hang up my robes, grow some hair, figure out a way to provide future damage control outside an imploding organization, and begin to work on those personal shadows that apparently "more zazen" can't illuminate. Sometimes, it seems, "The Way" really isn't "the way."

Love to you all,

Steve Dickinson