Report on Joshu Sasaki Allegations

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

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When ongoing questions of misuse of sexuality or power unfold in a spiritual community, it is rarely amatter of one person's actions. Reading through the painful and heartfelt accounts documenting JoshuSasaki's sexual relationships with students at Rinzaiji down through the years, we see how, knowinglyand unknowingly, the community was drawn into an open secret, and people's ability to practice thedharma suffered. Despite individual and collective attempts to address boundaries, repentance, andrectification, these behaviors appear to have continued over more than four decades. We have reportsthat 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, howcould 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 aproblem of Zen. It arises in various Buddhist communities, and more widely in other religiouscongregations. We are unfortunately susceptible to enthrallment, which is hardly "seeing things as theyreally are." There are certain problems that may arise when one sees a teacher as comprehensivelyenlightened and fails to deal with the certainty that he or she, like oneself, has a shadow or deludedaspect. We imagine that "enlightenment" is separate from or outside of ourselves. The community mayattempt to protect the teacher, the seeming embodiment of enlightenment. If we hold such a model, it isoften impossible to recognize or admit that there has been an abuse of power. We fear the loss of ourenlightened 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 clanclear standards for discernment of what is wholesome and unwholesome. This teaching has beendescribed as "the Buddha's charter of free inquiry."Come, Kalamas. Do not go upon what has been acquired by repeated hearing; norupon tradition; nor upon rumor; nor upon what is in a scripture; nor uponsurmise…nor upon another's seeming ability; nor upon the consideration, "The monkis our teacher." Kalamas, when you yourselves know: "These things are good; thesethings are without blame; these things are praised by the wise; undertaken andobserved, 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 freeinquiry held by each monk, nun, and community member. Twenty-five hundred years later we would bewise to value this standard. Enlightenment is not a commodity or an end state that justifiesunwholesome or harmful behavior. Realization is an ongoing activity. As the Buddha said, "Thesethings are good; these things are without blame…these things lead to benefit and happiness." We needto 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 weneed to stop and listen carefully. Beyond all lines of authority, devotion, and enthrallment with thedharma, 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.

Witness Council Report Outline

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1. General allegationsa. Respondents interviewed or reported publiclyi. Twenty--five individuals have either sent emails, consulted the Council for confidentialinterviews, published articles or have done both types of reporting. There are more thanfifty pages of these reports. These reports (encoded by number), confidential interviewsand published articles are listed in a redacted index to insure anonymity. Twenty--fourrespondents were Sasaki's students or former students. The numbers below representthe coded reports in which the issues and allegations appear. While there were onlytwenty--five respondents, there were forty--six documents. The numbers listed refer tothe document from which the comment is quoted.Eleven respondents gave first hand reports (by women) of attempted or actual sexualcontact (* used to identify first hand reporters of sexual contact or attempt here and inindex), thirteen respondents gave second hand reports of sexual contact, and onerespondent (not a Sasaki student) only reported on Sasaki's prison sentence formisappropriation of temple funds in Japan, and Sasaki's disinterest in caring for a childfathered there outside of marriage.b. Main categories of reported allegations related to Sasaki's sexual conducti. Concerned with abuse of trust/power as religious teacher – all twenty--five respondentsii. Sexual relations including kissing, groping of genitals or breasts, viewing genitals orbreasts, oral sex, intercourse: twenty--four reported some of these alleged sexualcontact1. Nine respondents reported the Rinzai--ji Oshos or Board's knowledge ofallegations or to have alerted the Board and the Oshos -- 1,3, 4,6,7 10,23, 28,32,* 37iii. Physical assault: 3,8,9, 18 reported rape crisis report filed, 18 also mentioned an assaultreported to the Los Angeles District Attorney's office (report of Sasaki assault onstudent) *37 was assaultediv. Disturbances to the community: 3,10, 17, *23, *37 reported interfering with students'relationship or marriagesv. Recommending pornography as practice 43vi. Complaints filed with public agencies: 7,8,18 mentioned rape crisis report, 18 reportedDistrict attorney report for Sexual assault and Children's Protective service regardingSasaki having sex with minorc. Reports of other Oshos making sexual demands of students: 3,7,8. Two respondents knew ofmale to male incident (anal sex or penis exposure), response 17 reported a male to femaleincident (osho with female student who was mentally impaired)2. Estimated number of women affected: Based on a number of interviews response 19 extrapolatedmore than one hundred women, response 35 extrapolated well over one hundred women over thedecades, response *38 estimated more than 300. The number of women is hard to estimate response19, 35, and *38 extrapolated more than one hundred3. Coercive methodsa. In relation to women/survivorsi. Offering sexual relations as a Zen teaching (eg non--attachment, emptiness): *2,6,10, 17,22, 25, *31, *37, 38ii. Arguing, berating or insulting women to insist upon their compliance with his demandsfor sex: 7, 8, 18, *37,iii. Offering to marry love interest 8iv. Physical force: 3, 6, 7, *31, *37

v. Interfering in marriage/relationship of students: 3, 17,*23, *37

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b. In order to quiet/suppress community dissent

i. Explaining the benefits of sexual relations as Zen practice: *2, 6, 7,10, *22, 17, *31,32,*37ii. Community belief that such relationships were the usual behaviors in Japan *8, 10iii. Sasaki's justifying his sexual touch as that of a doctor: 8iv. Sasaki threatening to resign and withdraw his teaching and leadership: 3,6,17v. Sasaki and community members discounting women and their allegations: 1, 3, 4,6,7,20,*23, *374. In retaliation against criticsi. Removal of Rinzai--ji position: 7,8, 15, 18ii. Removal of Rinzai--ji affiliation from their practice community: 7, 13, 18,20iii. Loss of practice center they had established: 6, 7, 13iv. Contact with respondent's work place (eg. disavowing ordination): 11v. Banning from attending/visiting Rinzai--ji practice place: 195. Other confounding factors (e.g., secrecy, special alliances)a. Reports of Sasaki fathering children outside of marriage: 3, 7, 8, 44b. Rumors of rewarding sexual partners with teaching empowerments or sangha property: 3, 7, 86. Other forms of misconduct related to community controla. Financiali. Retaliation at workplace: 11ii. Retaliation thru removal of practice community (potential means of livelihood): 7, 8, 11iii. Non--standard distribution of 501C3 funds through several Sasaki controlledcorporations: 8, 17 Document 26. Money made available to buy favors for Sasaki sexualpartners. Use of funds for such purposes outside of religious non--profit charterb. Drug use and violence: Report of use of marijuana resulting in osho shooting a dog, 8, 32, 35(excessive) alcohol consumption by Sasaki 357. Organizational structures that may have enabled silence or lack of dissenta. Osho lack of independent teacher status: 4, 6, 7, 8, *23, 25b. Inter--connected Boards of Directors from different practice centers: No independent practicecenter, all controlled by Sasaki 4,7,8, *23c. Interlinked Corporations, and transfer of funds between different practice centers: lack offinancial independence 4, 7, 8, *23d. Lack of informed independent Board of Directors: 4, 7, 8i. Sasaki would resign when allegation was current and troubling and then be re--instatedby Board when complainant departed/withdrew: 17e. Separate career track joju (support staff) and donai (zendo staff) which rewarded inji andisolated culturally, physically and through a separate practice schedule Roshi's femaleattendants (inji) 178. Long term effects on membersa. Lost respect Roshi *2, 3, 4, 6, 7, *22, *23, 27, 28, 30, *37, 42b. Lost respect Zen *2, 3, 4, 6, 7, *23, 27, 28, 30, *37, 42c. Lost practice place 4, 6, 7, *23, 27d. Felt depressed or needed therapy* 2, 4, 6, 7, 10. *23, 27, *31, *37, 42e. Loss of function (eg lost relationship or employment) *2

f. Deceased members whose complaints were never addressed 3, 6, 33

1 Summary of the Findings of the Witness Council Concerning Allegations of Sexual Behaviors by Joshu Sasaki

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Summary of the Findings of the Witness Council Concerning Allegations of SexualBehaviors by Joshu SasakiPurposeThe Witness Council was formed in November, 2012, when allegations arose concerning long-standing sexual behaviors by Joshu Sasaki. Many Zen teachers expressed concern about theseallegations. Some had heard rumors for many years, but all said they did not feel they couldcomment or consider taking action without a foundation of credible information. Because therewas an expressed need for information, the Witness Council was formed. The Witness Councilconsists of three individuals, with extensive experience and training in the field of behaviors byBuddhist and other spiritual teachers, who volunteered to be available to collect and summarizerelevant information in a sensitive, confidential manner. The three people in the WitnessCouncil are independent of Sasaki's Rinzai-ji centers — an important consideration, as

manysurvivors and other witnesses are not comfortable discussing their experiences or concernsopenly with members of a group from which they are disaffected.MethodsThe Witness Council collected information from a total of twenty-five individuals. There weretwenty-four individuals who practiced at one of Rinzai-ji's centers from the 1960's through2012, in three ways: through telephone interviews, through e-mails sent to the Group, andthrough public documents (sometimes followed by personal interviews). Eleven respondentsexperienced sexual contact (or attempted contact) and thirteen were second hand reports of suchcontact. Ten respondents were women and thirteen were men. All twenty-four individuals werecurrent or past students of Joshu Sasaki. One additional respondent (not a Sasaki student)reported on Sasaki's prison sentence for misappropriation of temple funds in Japan, and Sasaki'sdisinterest in caring for his child fathered there outside of marriage.All information consisted of statements from individuals. Consistency of accounts amongindividuals is noted below and in the accompanying document, Witness Council Report Outline.All accounts were accepted verbatim and no attempt was made to verify or further investigatethese accounts. Most respondents contacted us by e-mail, and when questions remained weattempted to follow up in person by telephone. Information was collected over a period of fourweeks.Most of the information consisted of firsthand accounts, such as "I was at a meeting when thisoccurred," or "He did this to me when I went into sanzen." Some were secondhand accounts, bymen, of what they had heard firsthand from women.Summary of FindingsTypes of acts described: There were consistent reports of sexual behavior by Joshu Sasaki,often initiated in the formal setting, privacy, and "face-to-face" encounters of the sanzen room.There were many accounts of Sasaki asking women to show him their breasts, as part of

"answering" a koan or to demonstrate "non-attachment." Some women repelled these requests

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and further physical advances. Many could not because they were physically overwhelmed, andsubsequently experienced sexual behavior including kissing, viewing of breasts or genitalia,fondling of breasts or genitalia, viewing or being asked to touch his genitalia, oral sex, andvaginal intercourse. Several women recounted that they were asked to sit on his lap, presumablyto be comforted. This physical intimacy progressed to sexualized behaviors initiated by Sasaki.There were no accounts of Joshu Sasaki asking men to show their genitalia in the course of"koan work."There were accounts of forced sexual and physical assault (against women's protests) whichresulted in one report to the Los Angeles District Attorney's office and one report to a rape crisiscenter. There was another report to a Child Welfare agency concerning Sasaki and a sexualencounter with an underage girl. One person had interviewed women Rinzai-ji students, andthree people extrapolated the number of women victims as well over one hundred.Secrecy and threats: There were a number of reports of coercion and of Joshu Sasaki framingthe sexual contact as a Zen teaching, or as beneficial. There were many accounts of his threats toresign if senior students took action to reveal or stop his sexual behavior. There were alsoaccounts which described actions perceived as retaliation against senior students who confrontedhim about his sexual behavior. These actions included loss of position, loss of ability to attendRinzai-ji events, and severing an affiliated center's connection to Rinzai-ji. There were severalreports of Joshu Sasaki interfering in students' marriages or other intimate relationships.Other concernsThere were descriptions of physical and cultural isolation of women who were assigned (often asfairly new students) to be Sasaki's personal attendant (inji). Injis did not necessarily keep theregular

monastery schedule and may have had sleeping quarters separate from the other staff.There were accounts of similar sexualized/sexual behavior in the next generation of Rinzai-jiteachers with their own students.Some respondents expressed concerns that there was no accountability (such as independentaudit) for movement of funds among the several corporations/corporate accounts related toRinzai-ji and that monies from the non-profit accounts were used to buy gifts for Joshu Sasaki'ssexual partners.Other relevant informationAlmost all respondents expressed their affection and admiration for Joshu Sasaki and theirgratitude for his teaching. One respondent said that her sexual encounters had been beneficial.All other female respondents were distressed by these encounters and the effects on womenstudents, and expressed their dismay that someone so gifted could behave in ways that seemedemotionally and sexually intrusive. Almost all respondents said that they had not at first realizedthe extent or harm caused by his behavior and some had justified his behavior for many years.Some expressed sadness that they had felt compelled to separate from Rinzai-ji and their close

sangha "family" due to Sasaki's long term, persistent behavior.

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A number of respondents expressed dismay that they themselves and/or the Rinzai-ji communityhad not been able to bring an end to this long-term behavior. They indicated that the way thecommunity was structured and functioned had enabled this behavior to continue for many yearsthrough rationalizing, acquiescing, keeping or demanding secrecy, threats or even supportingJoshu Sasaki's sexual behavior by encouraging women to participate. Others described occasionswhen the women victims and men who raised objections were dismissed or ridiculed. Theyexpressed their concern for the victims and others who had left the organization and may havebeen suffering in silence and isolation. A number spoke of their deep concern that Joshu Sasakiand the Rinzai-ji community undermined the potential of women students in practice.We hope that this information will be helpful to the larger Zen community. We offer it to theRinzai-ji community as an opportunity to follow up and address the concerns raised by thisreport. In our experience thus far, Rinzai-ji representatives have been very cooperative andinterested in our findings and have expressed appreciation for our efforts, understanding that agroup independent of Rinzai-ji offered additional opportunities for affected community members to dialogue about this matter.

Sections