

**BLIND  
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# Diamond Sangha

A ZEN BUDDHIST SOCIETY

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Dear Diamond Sangha members and friends:

CoEvolution Quarterly recently carried a story about Richard Baker's leave of absence from his position of Rōshi of the Zen Center of San Francisco, and about the events which took place before his departure and since. It seems that Baker Rōshi had an affair with a resident student last spring, and that the response of the Sangha to this affair carried with it general resentment of what his students perceived as his lack of communication with them. During his leave, he traveled extensively, and, most recently, we hear that he has resigned.

Widespread stories of exploitation of students, particularly women, have been repeated about the abbot of the Zen Studies Society of New York for many years. Recently, the abbot of the Zen Center of Los Angeles spent five weeks in intensive treatment of alcoholism, a condition that reportedly accompanied a number of abuses of his authority.

The world of American Zen is relatively small, and communication within it is almost instantaneous. We in the Diamond Sangha share the suffering borne by our sisters and brothers elsewhere, and it is important for us to review what has happened and to take appropriate action.

During the 1960s, many people felt betrayed by national leaders and by the apparent bankruptcy of the political-economic system. Some of these people took up Zen as a new way of life, just at a time when teachers were appearing. The priestly line of Zen, distinguished in enlightenment and culture, attracted a large number of members in a relatively widespread movement.

Some of the organizations that developed in this movement were "corporations of sole," that is, the head priest was the authority in all matters. Others were established with a more conventional kind of non-profit arrangement, but even then, the lines of authority came from above, for the most part. Members in these Zen centers were encouraged to forget themselves in obedience to the teacher, and to the Buddha who "stood behind him."

Now with scandals about the teachers in these centers being made public, many people are asking, "How could So-and So do zazen for twenty or thirty years and still violate the spirit of the precepts in such a flagrant way?" "Wasn't his character obvious to his teacher?" "What does transmission of the Dharma mean, after all?" I want to face these questions squarely.

A full response would take more space than we have in this issue of Blind Donkey. It would discuss the delusions possible in Zen study: the literal and shallow interpretation of "When I am tired I sleep; when I am hungry I eat." It would include a discussion of authoritarian and exclusively male modes of Sangha organization which accompanied Zen teaching to the West. It would examine cultural misunderstandings by Zen teachers and their followers. It would explain the place of the Buddhist precepts in Japanese Zen study, and

the importance of Confucianism in Far Eastern monastic life. It would take up charisma, power, and submission as psychological factors.

I suspect that even when we have understood all these matters completely, we will still be thrown back upon ourselves. If it is possible to ask hard questions about Zen leaders, with their marvelous heritage, then certainly we ourselves must acknowledge that we all have corrupt tendencies, simply as human beings. Where does such an acknowledgement lead us?

I think that it leads us back to zazen and to the old guidelines that have been neglected: the precepts, the paramitas, and the eight-fold path. It leads us to measures that will permit the Sangha to be responsible for its own governance. It leads us to establish forums that will guarantee open communication.

This means taking care of ourselves and being forthright with our teachers. Our responsibilities also extend to our sisters and brothers who are suffering the trauma of betrayal. Let's polish up the Sangha treasure! Let's take care of our own troubles, and get on with the bigger job out there!

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Robert Aitken". The signature is written in dark ink and is centered on the page.