

An Olive Branch

-a project of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh

December 2014

This newsletter is intended for teachers, leaders, and practitioners of all Buddhist traditions. While *An Olive Branch* is a project of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh, people from other Buddhist traditions and secular organizations turn to us for help with conflict, ethics, misconduct, and governance training.

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Safer Sanghas, Part Four



This issue of our newsletter continues the theme of "safer sanghas" introduced in the August issue.

In August we wrote, "Those who want to make their temple a safe place for everyone can evaluate their organization using four elements:

1. Strong bylaws
2. Clear policies
3. Solid grievance procedures
4. Training for teachers and students."

Each subsequent issue focused on one of the elements above. Now we turn our attention to training for teachers and students. The August, September, and October newsletters can be accessed [here](#).

Training for Teachers

Problems with abuse of power, misuse of money, sexual abuse, and addiction to alcohol or drugs arise, in large measure, from the lack of training for teachers.

Most Buddhist teachers in the United States do not receive any seminary training. There is no consistent information being shared or taught regarding the secular side of leading a sangha. There is no training on psychological concepts such as transference and counter-transference and none on the use of power and abuse of it. There is no training on the management of a U.S. nonprofit organization. There is a belief that the precepts are enough without looking at actual applications of them.

In *A Path with Heart*, Jack Kornfield wrote, "The training of most teachers and gurus in monasteries and ashrams in Asia or the United States is a mystical and inner training that almost never touches upon the difficult issues of power and its potential abuse. Teachers are thrown into the role of administrator, minister, guide, and confidant, in which they have tremendous responsibility and power. Yet, many of their spiritual systems and practices explicitly exclude the human areas of sexuality, money, and power from what is considered spiritual. This compartmentalization can produce teachers who are awakened and skillful in certain areas (meditation skills, koan practice, prayers, studies, blissing and even powerful loving-kindness) but are underdeveloped in great areas of their personal lives" (pg. 258).



There is great benefit for teachers to share stories, difficulties, and ask questions out-of-the-hearing of their students. Teachers can be forthright with each other and discuss topics that are inappropriate to discuss with students. Leaders in each Buddhist school or tradition can and should help teachers strengthen their understanding of the power differential between themselves and their students. An especially useful skill is conflict resolution, a specific process that leads people away from positions that polarize groups to win-win solutions where everyone's interest is included. And teachers should be urged to seek secular training in areas such as management, governance, psychology, etc.

Training for Sangha Members

It is easy for sangha members to wittingly or unwittingly make life difficult for their teachers. In various settings (sesshin/retreat, temple residency, daily practice, etc.) the intimate day-to-day living, working, studying together, and especially private interviews lead to a spiritual intimacy that then often steps over into physical intimacy. Lineages that are isolated from other Buddhist groups assume that physical intimacy is the norm. Secrecy abounds. People in mid-level administrative positions tell newer arrivals, "Worry about your own practice" when they should be fostering transparency, teaching the code of conduct, and reminding students about the whistle-blower policy.

When a sangha has an ethics policy (or code of conduct) that specifies acceptable and unacceptable behavior between teacher and student and between senior students and those who are new, it is like the dawn of a new day. The night-time fog of secret relationships evaporates. And with a whistle-blower policy and grievance procedure in place, everyone can be assured of a fair hearing when misconduct or conflict arise.

To ensure a safer sangha, leaders must strive for transparency - making sure that bylaws are followed and that teachers and students alike know the ethics policy (code of conduct) and grievance procedure. Training should be provided annually so everyone, students and teachers alike, may deepen their understanding of the misuse of power.



Training methods can include discussion, case studies, book reviews, and guest speakers.

Confronting Abuse of Power



The cover story of the winter 2014 issue of *Buddhadharma* magazine is titled *Confronting Abuse of Power* (page 46). In the article, Shinge Roko Sherry Chayat, one of four panelists, speaks about the value of working with *An Olive Branch*. Read the full article [here](#).

There is also a full-page sidebar titled "BE PROACTIVE: An Olive Branch presents an action plan for protecting sangha members from abuse and dealing with it if it happens" (page 50).

Some of the content from the magazine is posted online [here](#). Four articles are available:

1. *No More Secrets* by Tynette Deveaux, November 19, 2014
2. *Confronting the Abuse of Power* by Pamela Rubin, November 20, 2014
3. *Our Teachers Are Not Gods* by Rob Preece, November 20, 2014
4. VIDEO: *Confront Abuse by Believing* by Pamela Rubin, November 25, 2014.

The photo above is from *Buddhadharma* magazine.

Free Webinar Series on Ethics in U.S. Buddhist Groups

An Olive Branch is offering a series of free webinars to increase awareness and adoption of ethics statements. The scope of the term "ethics" includes all aspects of ethical behavior such as student-teacher relationships, handling money, and power dynamics. "Buddhist groups" includes all schools and traditions practicing in the U.S.

Each webinar will be presented by a prominent teacher, practitioner, or expert on ethics and will be facilitated by *An Olive Branch*.

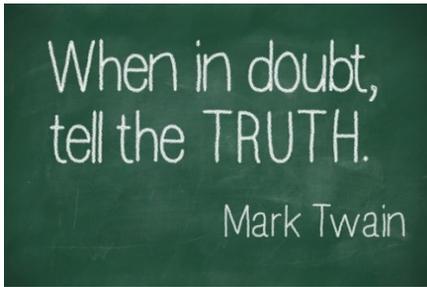
The featured presenter on January 27, 2015 is Shinge Roshi, Abbot of the Zen Studies Society. Shinge Roshi will share her first-hand experience living through a sangha's pain and confusion caused by misconduct and then leading the re-building of that sangha and its board.

Shinge Roshi is also the Abbot of the Zen Center of Syracuse, Hoen-ji. She was the first American woman to receive transmission in the Rinzai School of Zen Buddhism. The Zen Studies Society (<http://www.zenstudies.org/>) is based at Dai Bosatsu Zendo Kongo-ji monastery near Livingston Manor, NY and at the New York Zendo Shobo-ji in Manhattan.

[Click here to register and for a flyer](#) describing the series.



Nonprofit Truth or Consequences: The Organizational Importance of Honesty



[Here is an excellent article](#) that explores conditions that support untruths - conditions such as groupthink, imaginary conflicts, and hidden agendas. The author describes 11 everyday lies that serve to weaken a community. These everyday lies include exaggerating, not letting others know your true position, misplaced loyalty, and self-deception. And finally, she helps us understand the conditions that support truth telling - conditions we can strive to create in our communities.

It's an article worth reading and discussing in a sangha meeting.

Training and Services Available from An Olive Branch

Mediators from *An Olive Branch* are available to help resolve conflicts as well as to prevent them in the first place.

Consider having your sangha and/or its leadership participate in any of the following workshops:

- Spiritual Adults in Relationship
- Difficult Conversations
- Responsibilities of Nonprofit Boards.



We also offer facilitation services to those who want help with developing an ethics statement, whistle-blower policy, and grievance procedure. Our facilitators are available to support strategic planning and various kinds of retreats.

An Olive Branch strengthens organizations by helping leaders understand the role of conflict in organizational health.

- *To proactively address conflict, we offer dispute resolution training and help organizations design ethical governance procedures.*
- *To respond in the midst of disruptive conflict, we provide 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.

More information [here](#).

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