

Buddhadharma

THE PRACTITIONER'S QUARTERLY ONLINE

What Are You Waiting For?

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Clinical therapist Tamara Kaiser asks why Buddhist communities have not adopted ethical standards long accepted by the rest of society.

What happens in your sangha if a member has a conflict with a spiritual teacher over alleged psychological or sexual exploitation? Is there room for open discussion about the conflict, or is any such discussion automatically interpreted as a violation of "right speech" and suppressed? As a therapist and, for want of a better term, "spiritual seeker" whose practice includes meditation, I have followed the discussion regarding

sexual and psychological exploitation in the American Buddhist community for a number of years. I first became acquainted with these issues in the Buddhist community through my husband, a longtime Zen practitioner and meditation teacher. In my own profession, I have worked extensively with boundary issues in my roles as a therapist and supervisor of therapists (including those who have been sanctioned by a licensing board for violations of the profession's code of ethics) and also as a teacher of therapists and their supervisors.

Some in the American Buddhist community compare their current dilemma to that of the therapeutic community in the 1970s, a time when therapists came to recognize problems of abuse and worked to develop effective means to address them. They suggest that Buddhist communities will need years, if not decades, to establish clear ethical principles and processes by which to protect members and hold teachers accountable.

However, we know far more about sexual and psychological exploitation now than we knew thirty years ago.

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Photo by Mark Jensen
