

**From:** [AZTA@yahoogroups.com](mailto:AZTA@yahoogroups.com) [<mailto:AZTA@yahoogroups.com>] **On**  
**Behalf Of** Eido Frances Carney  
**Sent:** Friday, January 03, 2014 12:43 PM  
**To:** AZTA  
**Subject:** [AZTA] Discernment

Dear Friends,

In the midst of so much activity, I apologize for a long missive and take up Chozen's challenge to consider some history, albeit my own memory of coming for the first time to an AZTA meeting at San Francisco Zen Center in about 1999. It is my own experience of the event and it has to some degree shaped my view of the AZTA and of Zen in America. It is difficult to forget given the state we find ourselves in at this juncture.

At that time, about 50 maybe 60 or so teachers participated. One of the topics of that meeting nearly 15 years ago was sexual misconduct. I barely spoke because I had to listen to find my way into the culture of the organization. There were two awful and unforgettable moments. The first was when someone during the large discussion referred quite loudly and tauntingly to ██████████ as a "concubine" and many men teachers fell into pointed and mocking laughter. ██████████ sat quietly with a sick look on her face staring back at them. She couldn't seem to respond apparently because of the derisive attitude toward her. I know that I was shocked that she would be called out and insulted as a woman. The feeling was that she was the only one to be in a relationship with her teacher, which had been made public, was a committed relationship and was agreed to by the ██████████ Sangha. ██████████ was clearly made a spectacle of. To my knowledge, ██████████, a very fine teacher, never returned to participation in any organization nor do I know of her appearance in the American assembly of teachers since that day. As a woman teacher myself, this was my first inkling of the state of our community dialogue and attitude.

The second moment occurred further into the discussion when someone in the group asked: "How many teachers here have married one of their students?" To my astonishment, about three quarters of the room, all men, raised their hands in response to this question. One would have to be quite naive to suppose that the teachers and students had had no sexual activity prior to the marriages. The realization was that so many

teachers had committed sexual misconduct with a student. The fact that they had married afterwards had nothing to do with it. They had, by all ethical precepts, committed sexual misconduct. Most of the teachers agreed in a further chuckle that none would actually advise it. The suggestion was not that they didn't advise sex with a student, but that the marriage was not the most favorable because of issues of trust resulting from the beginnings of the relationship. Others who were there may remember what they will, but this was my experience.

It occurred to me that I might not want to be part of this assembly. After all, I was raised to understand that a priest should not have sex with a parishioner, a doctor should not have sex with a patient, a teacher should not have sex with a student, etc., etc. This was actually not just the Buddha's teaching, but it was state law. I wondered whether the teachers considered themselves priests, teachers, or professionals. I wondered what they thought about the dignity and sacred nature of Zen and Zen practice, themselves as leaders, and whether they had realized what they had been given and what they would be called upon to influence in the future. A tremendous hopelessness fed through me and I could not easily imagine a clear road for us all.

This was not a question of judgment of the people, but a feeling that our collective beginnings were initiated on spiritually undeveloped ground as teachers who would be called upon to live and model the best of the Buddha's wisdom. One person's behavior affects all of us so we have the karmic remnants on which we stand. Through these years, it would seem understandable that we might take so long to come to ethical guidelines because of such wide earlier immature beginnings.

I further questioned my participation on the list serve because of numerous bullying and gender related putdowns directed at me personally that were of little use to me in my life. It disappointed me that teachers would deal in such attacking speech as to cripple and poison the atmosphere of the list serve. It further disappointed that when gender putdowns arose, men did not speak out against and to other men publicly to put a stop to such discrimination. Male privilege seemed to prevail. Perhaps many voices began to drift away when it was no longer an act of sharing but an area to beware of.

And it seems to me now, like it or not, that we have a collective task to atone for and to make restitution for our lack of responsible restraint and

lack of response to our collective activity, which includes all of us including the current Japanese teachers under discussion. We are peripherally responsible. We are in this soup together one and all. It seems to me that the issues of the AZTA in our decisions to go forward must rely upon a responsible future and not seek to satisfy what our personal needs are at this time and place. We must think for us all and must make mature spiritual decisions, bigger than our own small selves, that will do the best we can to insure the continuation of our Transmissions in the Dharma in the strongest possible direction for the future. Our task is to protect the Dharma by applying the most favorable and mature pathway ahead for the next generations. I am not able to understand why, having a set of ethics in place to which we are all accountable, could possibly dampen collegiality.

While I know that each one must use discernment to come to her or his decision, I feel our culture requires the guidelines of ethical codes and procedures in order to steady itself and progress. We will always have a long way to go. The Buddha's Precepts are in place but we must be accountable. It would not hurt us to clean up our collective act and to leave a clear prescription for our descendants in the Dharma for what might help sustain and guide them through the long and difficult cultural and personal complications they will ultimately have to address.

In Dharma,  
Eido Frances Carney