

October 24, 2017

Dear White Plum Asanga,

I was contacted by Anne Seisen Saunders re: your concerns about my relationship with Maezumi Roshi. While she wanted to protect my name and privacy, I have nothing to protect and no need for privacy. I felt that if she, as president of the White Plum Asanga, were to say she had spoken with me, it might not be satisfactory. So I speak directly.

I first want to clear up any misnomers re my relationship with Maezumi Roshi so the facts are clear. I became romantically involved with him at the age of seventeen, after graduating high school, the summer before starting my freshman year at UCLA. The relationship was not consummated until I turned nineteen. There was no statutory rape.

I do not condone Maezumi Roshi's actions toward me those many years ago. He initiated the romance in clear abuse of his position, power and responsibility in the teacher-student relationship.

While I would never wish what happened to me on anyone else, I would not change it. I was somehow gifted with the ability to learn and grow from what happened to me. It took a long time. I also want to convey that, while Maezumi Roshi's actions were wrong, they were complex: I know he loved me and wanted the best for me; his actions toward me could also be very cruel. His own blind spots hindered his ability to manifest his love clearly. He did not have foundational support from his own cultural mores to deal appropriately with his feelings and made harmful mistakes.

I have no anger toward Maezumi Roshi, only compassion and love for the extraordinarily complicated human being he was.

This brings me to the more important things I have learned about human beings in general, those trusted with the role of teacher, and—specifically—Maezumi Roshi. I have learned that despite having capacity for great wisdom, at the bottom we are all human. Because we are human, we are flawed. I have developed compassion for the complex constellation of wisdom, innate perfection and blind flaws that we all are and all manifest. We don't control our blind spots; we would not act badly if we saw them.

Maezumi Roshi was no different. He had great wisdom, was a wonderful teacher in many ways and did extraordinary deeds to bring the Dharma to the West. He also had enormous flaws and blind spots which hurt those he taught and those he loved. These flaws do not diminish his pivotal place in the movement of the Dharma to the West.

While we can't change our past, we can learn from it. In this respect, I have learned from Seisen some of the things the White Plum Asanga has done to prevent these abuses from occurring again. While nothing is foolproof, at least you are trying and that is all one can ask. This is more than satisfactory to me.

In closing, my own life has been transformed by this practice. My vows and practice are my life. I continue to learn and develop compassion for the complex mess we all are. I do like what one of my teachers said when he gave me the precepts for the first time. I paraphrase: "These precepts are not meant to bind you but when you see clearly, you will no longer need them." Because I will never see with complete clarity, I will always need the precepts to help guide me through my blind spots. I have made and will continue to make mistakes despite the guidance

of these precepts. White Plum Asanga will continue to encounter problems despite your best efforts to prevent them. Then we deal with it. It's just the way it is and I learn compassion. I remain grateful that Maezumi Roshi came to this country.

With appreciation for the work you are doing,

Brenda (Jiun Chiko) Charlotte Beck Hess