



Soto Zen Buddhist Association
Ethics Claim Form

GENERAL INFORMATION

A. Person Against Whom This Claim Is Filed ("Respondent"):

Name: Geoffrey Shugen Arnold

Is the Respondent a member of SZBA? Yes ☒ No ☐ Don't Know ☐ (Note: If the Respondent is not an SZBA member, we will not process this claim, but may keep it on file should the respondent apply for membership in the future).

Respondent's Institutional Affiliation/Title/Position:

Head of the MRO; Abbot of Zen Mountain Monastery; head spiritual teacher
(Mountains & Rivers Order)

B. Person Filing This Claimant ("Claimant")

Name: [REDACTED] Max f/k/a Bosvi

Email: [REDACTED]

Phone: (work) [REDACTED] (cell) [REDACTED] (home) [REDACTED]

Preferred number? [REDACTED] Preferred Times of day: [REDACTED]

Instructions for leaving messages: [REDACTED]

II. CLAIM INFORMATION (II. A-C please answer only on this form)

A. In what context do you know the respondent? I became his formal student in June 2022. I took up residence nearby and was engaged in intensive practice then.

B. Did the alleged violation(s) occur against you? Yes ☒ No ☐ April 2022 - June 2023.

1. If "no," please give the name of the person(s) against whom the alleged violation occurred & your relationship to that person(s).

2. If "no" has the above person(s) consented to your filing on their behalf? Yes ☐ No ☐

C. Are these allegations reported or addressed in any other forum? Please give contact information for any forum checked.

☐ Civil, administrative or criminal court

☐ A professional licensing or certifying organization

SZBA Member's Temple or Zen Center

(please specify) To a degree: Zen Mountain Monastery's Ethics Committee

____ Other professional association

____ An employment entity

____ Other (please specify)

Note: For sections D, E, F, & G, concise information limited to five additional pages only will be considered at this phase. If initial criteria for a claim are met, this form and attached pages will be sent to the person you named for a response. The respondent's form parallels this one with a 5-pg. attachment limit. You both will have further opportunity to provide evidence (emails, conversations, photos, records, evaluations, etc.) as well as contact information for up to 7 people with knowledge of the situation if this claim proceeds to a review.

D. Describe the incident(s) that occasions this claim.



E. Cite the specific section(s) of the SZBA Code of Ethics you believe has/have been violated. For assistance, contact SZBA staff at ethics@szba.org.

F. Describe any efforts made to resolve this complaint or to address the conduct alleged in the claim. Give the forum, dates, participants.

G. Identify what action or remedy you seek from filing this claim (note: monetary awards, reimbursements, settlements, or any other financial action is not available from this process or association.)

III. CONSENT AND FILING INSTRUCTIONS

The information contained in this Claim Form is accurate to the best of my present knowledge and constitutes my formal claim. I consent to the release of my name and any information I supply, and/or information obtained by SZBA in the course of processing this claim to the respondent and to people authorized by SZBA. I will cooperate fully with the process as described in the SZBA Ethics & Grievance Process. Should the respondent have information that is confidential or privileged about me, I authorize release of that information for this investigation. I recognize I will have access to information gathered by the SZBA only at its discretion and according to the Ethics & Grievance Process.

Signed   Max Fikla Basri Date 11/9/2024

Thank you for your careful attention to this process. Please limit your description (D-G) to 5 or fewer pages. Send these materials, marked "Confidential," to:

SZBA Ethics Complaint, 2 of 2:

Geoffrey Shugen Arnold

Submitted by Max Akla Bosui, 11/9/2024

D. Describe the incident:

I submitted a complaint to the ZMM Ethics Committee (EC) on **March 16, 2023**. This complaint, which named two incidences of gendered harm by an individual student, was itself centered on the harmful response(s) of ZMM leadership¹ and the institutional failure(s) in addressing harm. The ZMM EC Recommendations (which, in my view, were far too limited in scope) named (1) Person A, the individual student; (2) Shugen Roshi, (3) Mn. Gokan, and (4) the culture of the Mountains and Rivers Order overall, as causing me harm.

In my complaint process with the ZMM EC, I was afforded a single, hour-long interview to detail my experience. This hour was dominated by their questions about the originating (2) incidences of harm by the perpetrating student, Person A. The ZMM EC ended this interview without having heard from me about my experiences with Shugen, so I requested an additional meeting. However, and because the ZMM EC never offered an additional interview, I submitted an email briefly outlining several problematic experiences I had had with Shugen. Again, in the aftermath of my email, there was no follow up by the ZMM EC.

The ZMM EC Recommendations, **July 5, 2023**:

- Shugen "showed poor judgement" in his interactions with me "and caused Bosui further harm";
- the EC was "struck by Shugen's centering of male experience and needs during this series of interactions" (with myself and Person A);
- when prompted by the EC, Shugen "expressed to the EC that he did not believe his actions were gender based" and that "the EC disagrees with that assessment".
- the ZMM EC concluded that "[m]ore needed to be done in response to Bosui's need to feel safe to practice within the MRO; that "the scale was tipped in favor of Person A's change for the better at the expense of Bosui's change for the worse".
- the ZMM EC generalized that, institutionally, there is "a pattern of centering men within the MRO and the systems of patriarchy, sexism and misogyny [are] underlying this pattern".

While the ZMM EC did in fact call out harm enacted by Shugen, they refrained from investigating and documenting my full experience with him as Abbot and within the context of our student/teacher contract. For this reason, among others, on **January 29, 2024**, I sent clarifications/addendums to my case record in response to the ZMM EC invitation to do so.

¹ By "leadership", I am speaking of the leadership triad at ZMM: Mn. Geoffrey Shugen Arnold (Roshi), Mn. Danika Shoan Ankele (Osho), and Mn. Bear Gokan Bonebakker (Dharma Holder). All were interacting with me and instrumental in the actions taken.

I left the MRO in the summer of 2023.

Until now, my story of harm related to my experience of Shugen has been incomplete. It is Shugen communicating to Carol Merchasin on August 30th of this year ~~complaint to~~ he ~~2~~ 2) wherein he referenced only the individual student ("the person who had caused the harmful situation"), that has me submitting a focused and expanded complaint now. In this simple emailed sentence of August 30th, Shugen presents – as he did consistently and repeatedly with me over time – as ignorant of his own culpability.

E. Specific sections of the code:

1) 2. Ethical Standard for SZBA Members, (iv) to uphold the mission of the SZBA; See 1c.: *The SZBA shall recognize the equality of women, nonbinary, Black/Indigenous people of color (BIPOC), and LGBTQIA+ people and work to ensure their full participation in the community, education, leadership, and programs.*

Shugen chose actions and oversaw decisions, which prohibited me from *full participation in the community and programs* at ZMM following a gendered assault I suffered onsite and in which he himself played a role. For 5 months, until I left the MRO, the prohibitions to my practice matched those meted out to the perpetrator; and at times, exceeded those imposed on my perpetrator in order that the perpetrator be given priority to practice. The ZMM EC found his actions to be a direct result of gender bias; he was further noted in the report to be utterly ignorant of, and in denial of, his gender bias.

2) 3. SZBA Member Responsibility, item (a) *Integrity*, (i) *the relationship with practice students and temple members is founded on deep trust and respect.*

I wish to speak to the SZBA Ethics Committee on a specific interaction with Shugen in his capacity as my spiritual teacher, and within the container of spiritual practice. I have not spoken to anyone in the MRO community about this experience. — SEE "MY FINAL DOKUSAN"

3) 3. SZBA Member Responsibility, item a) *integrity*, ii. *The authority of the Zen teacher carries with it an increased responsibility to avoid situations and actions that could result in harm to the student, the community, and/or the teacher.*

The ZMM EC Recommendations paired with the clarification/addendum I submitted to the ZMM EC, make it clear that rather than avoiding situations and actions that could result in harm (to both ~~Person A~~ and I), Shugen kept himself central in their unfolding. ~~Person A~~ and I were both Shugen's students at this time. ← "Person A"

Specifically, and absent from the ZMM EC Recommendations:

- a) In the dokusan room, I repeatedly and increasingly presented the bind I was experiencing by trying to work with him in the role of my spiritual teacher while being denied full access to practice by him in his role as Abbot. Shugen never suggested I seek

spiritual guidance from another teacher during this time, which included the filing of my ZMM EC complaint.

- b) I reached a level of distress where I couldn't handle the dissonance of his dual roles. I followed the ZMM protocol, asking him for his permission to see another teacher during this time. It took me asking twice, in 2 separate dokusans, before he gave his consent.
- c) In dokusan, Shugen bypassed my suffering through use of the Dharma. My experience of him and his teachings in face-to-face meetings, became one of power-over, where the Dharma was weaponized to cast doubt and shame on me. I have clear examples.
- d) Ultimately, he made a choice in (what became my final) dokusan which ended my ability to remain in relationship with him, and which resulted in what I find fits the definition of spiritual abuse. (I do not say this lightly. SEE #2 above).

4.) **2. the Ethical Standards for SZBA Members, item (e) Confidentiality, (i.)** Members should treat the content of all spiritual conversations as confidential, except as may be required by law.

"Person A"
In my first meeting with Shugen (as Abbot) after the verbal assault perpetrated by *"Person A"*, Shugen centered *"Person A"*. This was called out in the ZMM EC Recommendations. What isn't named in the ZMM EC report, is that Shugen kept the communication centered on *"Person A"*, specifically, by revealing *"Person A"*'s struggles with mental illness. I knew nothing of this and I didn't want to. Shugen presented me with details of *"Person A"*'s mental illness history, such as extreme paranoia. Shugen shared that he has had conversations with *"Person A"*'s therapist; that the therapist and Shugen agree that *"Person A"* does better when he's at ZMM; that *"Person A"* had entered his current 3-month residency (which was wrapping up at the time of my assault) in "very bad shape"; that he is so much better now.

At the time, and still, was and am appalled. This communication by Shugen is why this Ethical Standard exists. It damaged my sense of trust and safety with Shugen, both psychologically and spiritually (a total violation of **Code 3, a, ii.** – #3 above); and it also served to intensify my concern for my physical safety (and that of the sangha) related to *"Person A"*.

4) **4. Ethical Violations and Members' Obligations to the SZBA, item (a) Self-Reporting, ii.** Members shall provide SZBA staff immediate notice of any claim of unethical conduct made against them whether in their role as priest or any other role, regardless of degree of (in)formality of such complaint and regardless of the authority, court, organization, tribunal, or any other body notified.

The ZMM EC Recommendations found that Shugen (and Mn. Gokan) "in their interactions with Bosui caused her further harm." Detail of the harm, and recommended actions, is within the ZMM EC Recommendation report.

Did he (ever) self-report? My case had not been reported at the time of my June 2024 filing with the SZBA.

If not, **4. Ethical Violations and Members' Obligations to the SZBA, item (a) Self-Reporting, (vi)** Failure to report or provide accurate, complete, and truthful information constitutes a violation of this Code of Ethics.

F. Efforts made to resolve this complaint: In addition to the formal complaint procedure with the ZMM EC, and following my submittal, I was in process of crafting a "reparative conversation" (following ZMM protocols) with Shugen. I was developing this in conjunction with Mn. Shoan who serves as Training Coordinator. I chose to abort this 'reparative conversation' immediately after my significant experience in dokusan with Shugen (SEE #2 above). I also have, as detailed in my concurrent SZBA filing, spent more than 10 months actively seeking a response from the ZMM EC about their 'check ins' so I could ascertain the degree to which Shugen and the MRO have been held accountable to the Recommendations.

G. Actions I seek:

***Accountability:** I would like the SZBA to ensure Shugen is held accountable consistent with the Standard of Ethics; I would like the SZBA to ascertain to what degree, if at all, the ZMM EC Recommendations related to Shugen, Gokan and the MRO have been acted on. And I would like the SZBA to be transparent about their findings with me.

I would like a high-quality apology from Shugen. If a member(s) of the SZBA could work with Shugen to recognize and acknowledge *anything at all*, with specificity, related to the harm he caused me; if Shugen were able to acknowledge what he now understands caused great harm in his language and/or actions (with specificity), and apologize; if Shugen were able to communicate his apology to me with human and heartfelt language; and if Shugen would state his conviction moving forward to both excavate his internal conditioning, and work diligently to prevent similar mistakes being perpetrated by himself or others within the MRO; I would receive it as a deep and meaningful gift.

***Training:** with a focus on generating Shugen's understanding around the connection of his actions and words to his impact on students, I would like Shugen to be required to engage in both intensive and ongoing trainings related to use of power and also implicit bias. I would like the trainings to be outside the culture and practice communities of Zen. * (Ultimately, I would like all monastics to be required to train around power and bias).

***Institutional policy:** I want policy implemented for an accountability structure to which the Abbot, Teacher, and Head of the MRO, is/are held (before reaching the level of the SZBA). Whether or not it is a revised Ethics Committee, this entity/body needs to include non-members of the MRO, and non-Buddhists.

I want a policy that mandates Shugen step away from all spiritual student/teacher relationships with anyone who is involved in a ZMM EC investigation. This includes any monastic involved, any student involved, and stepping away from teacher/student roles with any/all ZMM EC members working on a complaint related to Shugen or another monastic. (I can expand on why this matters, in my view from my experience).

I would like the SZBA to engage reflection, separately and together with the MRO sangha, about the serious (ethical...psychological...spiritual) consequences related to conflict-of-interest when the same person (and a white cis-male, to boot) holds all 3 senior leadership roles.