

## Sanction Review

### in reference to the “SZBA Ethics Report 1222025”

April 7, 2026

Dear Shugen Arnold Roshi, the Zen Mountain Monastery Board and Ethics Committee,

We are writing to inform you that the one-year sanction imposed following the findings of the SZBA Ethics Committee has now concluded.

This sanction was enacted in response to ethics violations relating to SZBA member responsibilities of integrity. Following MC’s initial complaint, the ZMM Ethics Committee investigated, found both behavioral and institutional issues of concern, and issued recommendations. MC was unsatisfied with the outcome and subsequent communication. Following that, after MC filed a claim with the SZBA, the SZBA Ethics Committee investigated, and decided to issue a formal warning, with a one year sanction.

As part of the sanction, we requested that Shugen Roshi (SAR) undertake a series of actions to make it less likely that similar missteps would happen in the future. These recommendations involved making amends, institutional reorganizational efforts, and further training. Over the past year, we have appreciated SAR and ZMM’s cooperation with the process, and we acknowledge the steps you have taken during this period to reflect, learn, and engage with the ethical commitments of our tradition.

The claim, the investigation, the recommendations in the sanction, and this review all include both individual and institutional components, recognizing SAR’s influence on the broader MRO and ZMM in particular. In reviewing the progress with the recommendations laid out in the sanctions, we have found the following:

#### **1. Making Amends:**

SAR issued a letter of apology. It is a significant step for a prominent Buddhist teacher to offer this kind of communication.

In the sanction, we recommend that you offer an effective apology to the claimant that acknowledges responsibility for the harm done and details the ways this problem will be avoided in the future. By our reading, the apology acknowledges responsibility, but fails to make it specific.

It’s clear from the apology that SAR would have done some things differently. It’s not clear,

from the apology, that SAR has much empathy for MC's experience, that gender-bias in the situation was understood, nor that SAR understands structural aspects of the situation differently than he did at the time of the incident. This raises the concern that similar incidents could occur in the future.

## **2. Reorganization Efforts:**

Communication with ZMM Ethics and Board members gives us the impression that significant work is underway in this regard. We appreciate that a working group focusing on sexual misconduct and gender bias was involved in the revisions. We also understand that there will soon be clearer reporting pathways, confidentiality provisions, timing and responsiveness standards, outside review when appropriate (including in cases involving abbots), and follow-up mechanisms to ensure recommendations are followed.

All of these are encouraging revisions at face value. The changes have not happened on the institutional documents offered on the ZMM website, and so we cannot evaluate the efficacy or thoroughness of those documents, and have not reviewed the drafts.

There are some minor concerns still. It is not clear that the Ethics Committee has undergone any changes in its makeup to reduce potential bias to protect the institution or the teacher at the expense of a claimant. It is also not clear that there is a mechanism for reporting to professional organizations such as White Plum Asanga, SZBA, or SZNA in the case of misconduct.

We recognize it's a difficult process making change in a larger organization, and it appears that this effort is genuine.

**3. Further Training:** We understand that there is ongoing effort to examine gender bias and privilege at ZMM. We understand that SAR has consulted with several female dharma teachers about these issues, that SAR and other leaders at ZMM have taken the Healthy Boundaries and a sexual harassment training, and that these will be offered annually.

These are important steps. We feel like these are a good start, and also have the impression that more is needed. If the approach to these trainings by seniors and leaders are formulaic then real changes in perception and behavior won't happen. These kinds of trainings need to be followed with demonstrable action, showing that the environment is actually different. In discussions we have had, there are several recent examples suggesting that the environment is not actually that different yet. We encourage you to continue this important work, and to be accountable to the sangha by sharing the ways in which this is happening

With the completion of this period and in accordance with the terms set forth by the Ethics Committee, the sanction is lifted, and your standing as a member of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association in good standing is hereby reinstated.

We hope that this process has increased clarity about the effects of speech and actions at both a personal and institutional level. Ethical and compassionate conduct supports our collective vows and the well-being of the sangha. This letter will be kept in your personal file with the SZBA. If a pattern of violations emerge, a stronger response would be warranted.

Should you have any questions or wish to speak further about any aspect of this, please let us know.

In gassho,

Kakumyo Lowe and Nentetsu Yuschak

On behalf of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association Ethics Committee