

# Finding Safe Harbor: Buddhist Sexual Ethics in America

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When the Buddha left home in search of spiritual understanding, he left behind his wife and presumably the pleasures of sex. After his enlightenment, he encouraged others to do the same: renounce the world of the senses to seek liberation from suffering. The monks and nuns that followed the Buddha's teachings formed a kind of sexless society, a society that did not reproduce itself biologically.<sup>1</sup> By abstaining from sexual relations, Buddhist monastics intended to reduce attachment and model an alternative to lay life. Buddhist society would continue via transmission of the teachings, a spiritual form of continuity not dependent on sex.

But of course, the Buddha was teaching ordinary people with ordinary appetites for sexual contact. And these appetites could really get in the way of spiritual progress; thus we find no shortage of Buddhist commentary on sexuality and its ramifications. And despite 2,500 years of wisdom on this subject, Buddhist teachers and students are still blundering into sexual contacts that undermine their own progress and often the progress of others. Clearly this is not a human fallibility that can be corrected by setting up some simple rules. In fact, sexuality is one of the most deeply hard-wired neurological drives of the human organism, not easily uprooted even for lofty spiritual ideals.

From a Buddhist perspective, working with sexuality is working with attachment. How can we understand that attachment in its biological origins? In *A Natural History of Sex*, Adrian Forsyth describes in vivid detail the ecology and evolution of mating behavior in the animal kingdom.<sup>2</sup> In sixteen chapters that cover every biological strategy you can imagine—from incest to role reversal, infanticide to sex change—the author shows how costly sex can be to individual organisms. Though sex is not the only means of reproduction, it certainly involves the most complex behaviors, anatomical variations, social choices, and in a few cases, the risk of death. What can possibly merit such a great investment in momentary pleasure (if indeed it is pleasurable for some animals)? The evolutionary answer is, genetically variable offspring. Variation is the key to surviving calamity as a species. If all animals of a species were genetically identical, they would be terribly vulnerable to single events that exploited their weaknesses. But with variation, there is always a chance that some will make it

through and go on to survive the new conditions (post-earthquake, fire, icestorm, plague, etc.).

Seen from the long view of evolution, sexuality is the key to survival of the species. So it is not surprising that sexual conditioning affects the entire human brain, a fact well known to human adolescents. To see how much conditioning must be addressed by Buddhist practice, we can look briefly at the neural map of the human brain. The part of the cortex that responds to touch is wrapped around the cerebrum, with specific areas registering touch in the different parts of the body. The area taken up by the genitals is about as large as the rest of the chest, abdomen, and back put together. It is equivalent to the area used for the hands or the lips, two parts of the body where touch is crucial for finding and managing food. Rita Carter, in *Mapping the Mind*, points out that “connections from the sex-sniffing, sex-seeking and sex-reactive areas of the limbic systems radiate to almost every corner of every cortical lobe, feeding the urge to our conscious minds.”<sup>3</sup> Sexual activity involves not only touch and high-level visual recognition but also emotion, thought, and, in the frontal lobes, morality—some of our most sophisticated and abstract thought processes.

It is clear that sexuality presents no small challenge to religious practice. How has Buddhism attempted to work with this deep biological conditioning? The central guidelines for Buddhist ethics can be found in the five foundational precepts. Practicing the precepts is seen as a way to reduce suffering and to deepen one’s capacity for achieving enlightenment. The first two precepts deal with not killing and not stealing, the third precept deals with not engaging in sexual misconduct, the fourth is not lying, and the fifth is not using intoxicants. The original language for the third precept in the Pali texts is *kamesu*, or wrongful conduct with regard to the five sense organs.<sup>4</sup> Sexual misconduct is seen as a particularly damaging form of sensual abuse since sexual activity can generate so much suffering. The Buddha is said to have admonished his followers to avoid unchastity “as if it were a pit of burning cinders.”<sup>5</sup> This is some indication the Buddha recognized how powerful the sex drive is in forming attachment.

In contrast to the absolute morality expressed in some Christian traditions, where sexuality may be seen as a sin against God, the basis for Buddhist chastity is more instrumental, almost pragmatic. Getting tangled up in sex makes it much harder to be free of attachment and attain enlightenment. Two synonyms for nirvana point to this: *viraga* means “absence of lust” and *tanbakhaya* means “waning of craving.”<sup>6</sup> The enlightened person is one who is free from craving or desire. The Second Noble Truth points to desire as the cause of suffering. To be free of desire is to be free of suffering. Craving or desire is seen as driving the twelve links of codependent origination. Desire arises from feelings generated from sensation through contact (and sexual contact is very strong contact). Quite quickly, in a single moment, craving can lead to attachment to the feelings (positive or negative) generated by contact. Attachment generates consciousness, which leads to further stages of becoming. A lot of attachment keeps one firmly in the grip of the endless cycle of desire. The Buddha advised his followers to avoid sexual contact in order to reduce the grip of attachment and thus attain their spiritual goals with less distraction.

What, in particular, is the nature of attachment formed through sexual activity? The Buddhist ethicist Saddhatissa points to the danger of lusting after permanence through procreation.<sup>7</sup> The Buddhist view of the world, however, is that everything is impermanent. Understanding this is key to developing equanimity in the face of an ever-changing reality. Sexual activity can also dispel loneliness, reinforcing a false sense of the “I” as permanent. Another danger is attachment to power within a sexual relationship. This kind of lust also builds the ego self, using various degrees of domination to maintain self identity. For some, attachment can arise from addiction to stimulation and arousal, the need for constant sensation. The Buddha used the metaphor of the leper who tried to cure his wounds by burning them. Applying fire provided some relief but soon the sores festered from the burns and began itching again. The Buddha offers a more effective cure brought by a great physician, the medicine of the Dharma, which can cure the leper forever of the addictive craving.<sup>8</sup>

Sexual activity is seen as the strongest bond to earthly existence. The Buddha compared it to the stickiest kind of tree sap. Once stuck in this sap, like Br'er Rabbit in the briar patch, it is very difficult to get free. The monastic solution was to practice celibacy. The requirement of celibacy is in fact usually central to the definition of monastic practice. But what about lay practitioners, family members, and ordinary men and women still bound by their evolutionary inheritance? The third precept at least provided some limits on human behavior that could minimize their suffering.

#### SEX, BUDDHISM, AND MODERN AMERICA

When the most recent wave of Buddhism came to the West, this sticky tree sap was a conspicuous part of the social landscape of the 1960s. Beats, hippies, and love children were all breaking out of the “sex is sin” era of the 1950s. California Buddhists were surrounded by the free-sex revolution; it was pretty hard to ignore. Complicating this was the confusing fact that Japanese priests were not celibate. In the nineteenth century at the end of the Tokugawa era, all Buddhist sects were removed from government control and released from legal restraints on marrying. In fact, the government encouraged priests to marry in an attempt to break up the power of Buddhism. Japanese Buddhists no longer held to celibacy as a defining practice. How did this confusion translate to lay Americans trying to figure out what Zen was? Buddhist poet Gary Snyder observed, “The questions of marriage, family, and sexuality have never been resolved. Not by the Japanese, and less so by the Americans. They just overlook them. They don’t know what else to do with them.”<sup>9</sup>

In the effort to establish Zen in America, the side stories about sexuality are not so pretty. Let me illustrate with a personal note. My own practice experience with the San Francisco Zen Center in the 1980s was entirely marked by the shadow of a major sexual scandal involving the abbot Richard Baker. After a phenomenal growth period in which Zen Center developed three practice centers, bought numerous buildings, and established several major businesses—putting Zen Buddhism strongly on the map in America—the whole house of cards came tumbling down in 1983 when the abbot had several affairs, the last of which was with his best friend’s wife. The entire

tale of denial and betrayal has been recounted by Michael Downing in *Shoes Outside the Door*, a book that many Zen students were afraid to see published.<sup>10</sup> I moved to Green Gulch Zen Center in 1984 and lived there for three years in the aftermath of this psychic avalanche that splintered the community and left people's practices in tatters for some time. I had no personal relationship with Richard Baker nor had I studied with his teacher, Shunryu Suzuki. I came to practice with others interested in Zen and I found an organization drowning in doubt, completely unprepared for the impact of losing their teacher, director, entrepreneur, and financier. Baker's exposure and departure was called "the apocalypse"; after his era, everything changed.

Richard Baker was not the only Zen teacher to be caught up in sexual politics. There were a rash of betrayals and crises in the 1980s and early 1990s, including Maezumi Roshi at the Los Angeles Zen Center and Osel Tenzin, the named successor to Chogyam Trungpa. Osel Tenzin, it turned out, not only had many affairs, but also was HIV positive, thus spreading more than the dharma until he finally died (presumably of AIDS). The Shambhala community is still recovering from the enormous impacts of this scandal and have not fully addressed the need for preventative policies to protect students from inappropriate sexual behavior. Why has this area of ethics been so difficult to approach for American students?

Michael Downing offers a number of opinions, culled from the many interviews he did in researching the San Francisco Zen Center story. First, there was the willing collusion in mystifying the teacher as the perfect authority. Students were silent and submissive in their allegiance to their teacher, unwilling to challenge him on his behavior, even when they knew what was going on. Second, as an institution the Zen Center was not particularly sophisticated in communication and facilitation methods for building open community. Major decisions were made by the very capable abbot and carried out by the staff. The board of directors was more or less a rubber stamp to the abbot, continuing the tradition begun with the founding teacher, Shunryu Suzuki, under the assumption that this was the way monasteries were run. Third, personal aspirations for dharma transmission from Baker trumped people's concerns that something was amiss. If their Zen "fate" was in the hands of the teacher, it was crucial to protect that teacher-student relationship in order to advance spiritually. Fourth, there were relatively few feedback systems in place to provide reality checks for the abbot, or, for that matter, for the students. Communication was private, often secret, and not transparent, with no peer check-ins of significance. Baker no longer had a teacher to check his behavior or understanding, and he became isolated in the leadership position, finding peers only outside the organization. And last but certainly not least, the institutional pressures of running several businesses, particularly Greens restaurant (which was a smash success but took tremendous effort from Zen students who worked more or less at slave wages), took their toll on everyone. Budget oversight was slim and even though funds continued to pour in from supportive donors, the Zen Center ran in the red most years. It didn't help that Baker spent money freely on such things as a \$30,000 BMW, justifying his needs as crucial to his capacity to function.

Each case of sexual misconduct raised concerns about institutional viability, leaving students not only in shock about their teacher's behavior but wondering how their home practice center (and thus their practice) would survive the organizational earthquake. The scandals also exposed American students' naïveté in dealing with their teachers. Whereas Japanese monks in training learn to wink at their teachers' faults, hoping mostly to emulate the teachers' strengths, American students fell in love with Zen and their Zen teachers, intoxicated by the exotic religion of the East. The intoxication was a wonderful high, particularly for those who were disenchanted with Western religion and also Western government, with all the fallout from the Vietnam War. Who wanted to come down from that communally exuberant high? No one. When the bubble burst, it was very painful, and with much soul-searching, many people left the Zen Center.

As these stories hit the media, Buddhist teachers around the world offered advice, refuge, and reconciliation. From being almost a nonissue, sexual ethics rose to top billing, with Buddhist centers all over the Western world recognizing their own vulnerability in this area. Several leading figures took this opportunity to develop their teachings on sexual ethics and the precepts. These then became the basis for further institutional reform across the next decade. Robert Aitken and Thich Nhat Hanh were two of the close advisors for the Zen Center.

As head teacher for the Honolulu Zen Center, Aitken had to confront the issues of men and women practicing together. Though this was not the traditional monastic way, he felt it was important for Americans to sit together in the *zendo* and share all the tasks of maintaining a practice center, even though he knew this would raise some challenges. He felt there was "an experience of wholeness in having the other sex in close association throughout the day."<sup>11</sup> Though sexual fantasies and initiatives were still present, he thought they became more acceptable as normal in a mixed-practice situation, and therefore less a focus of attention. Aitken took a practical approach by admitting that "the sexual drive is part of the human path of self-realization."<sup>12</sup>

In Aitken's now classic work, *Taking the Path of Zen*, published in 1982, he admonished students not to indulge in casual sex, stealing like a thief from others or undervaluing one's self as an agent of the Dharma. He wrote, "Sex is neither pure nor impure. Our attitude about it can either be disruptive or conducive to deep practice."<sup>13</sup> He developed these ideas further in *The Mind of Clover*, his set of essays on the precepts that came out in 1984 just after the Zen Center news had broken. He translated the third precept as "no unrighteous lewdness" or, in his words, "no boorish sex."<sup>14</sup> He felt asceticism as well as lewdness could be boorish, defining boorish as "thinking just of one's self." In his center's precepts ceremony, Aitken uses the translation from Bodhidharma: "not creating a veneer of attachment is called the Precept of Not Misusing Sex."<sup>15</sup> Aitken's expositions on this precept helped to ground American Zen sexual ethics firmly in Buddhist concerns about self-centered attachment, redirecting some of the overly zealous Puritanical critique that arose in response to the betrayal. As a leading advisor for the Buddhist Peace Fellowship,

Aitken had the ears of concerned Buddhists across the country who were looking for insight on this thorny issue. His authority and even-handed approach to sexuality was a refreshing balm in the field of wounds left behind from inappropriate sex.

Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh was also involved in helping the Zen Center through the morass of feeling left in the wake of the sexual scandal. He offered Richard Baker refuge at Plum Village in France and a chance to reflect on his actions and the process of reconciliation. As a celibate monk, Thay (as his students called him) had virtually no experience with sexuality, but it was plain to him that Baker's irresponsibility had severely disrupted the stability of the practice community. His very pragmatic approach was to work toward stability, encouraging all members of the community to take responsibility for their part in creating the situation. In 1985, Thay created a vow-taking ceremony based on his "Fourteen Wonderful Precepts." This version of the precepts was radical and controversial in a number of ways; at Green Gulch Zen Center they were seen as almost a subversive form of the precepts.

Thay's original version of the third precept was worded:

Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of the Way. Sexual expression should not happen without love and commitment. In sexual relationships, be aware of future suffering it may cause others. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.<sup>16</sup>

In a later commentary, he explained that this precept was strongly linked with the fifth precept of not consuming alcohol or drugs, since both concerned destructive and destabilizing behavior. He felt the primary emphasis should be on creating and supporting a stable society that could then support a stable spiritual practice. For Thich Nhat Hanh, sex is an "act of communion between body and spirit."<sup>17</sup> If this communion is made with respect and care, then there will be less suffering. He criticized the misuse of the word "love" in the Western world, where it is usually equated with desire or the attachment associated with being lovesick. He said this attachment is like a drug that makes us feel wonderful but is addicting. It can be a kind of prison in which we entrap the loved one. Instead, Thay explained that sexual energy is a valuable source of energy that can be used to attain deep realization. He criticized the sex industry and the use of sex to sell products, warning that this too violates the third precept.

In fall 1990 the Buddhist Peace Fellowship took up the issue of sexual ethics in a town meeting held in Berkeley, California. This began some important public healing work and the eventual construction of sexual ethics guidelines for American Zen practice centers. One of the panelists was Peter Rutter, author of the recently released book *Sex in the Forbidden Zone*.<sup>18</sup> Dr. Rutter documented a pattern of abuse across many positions of power, showing that what happened at the Zen Center was part

of a widespread cultural phenomenon in the United States. Disturbing as that was, it was also very helpful to analyze the patterns of secrecy and self-deception that characterized sexual abuse. Feminist writer Susan Griffin pointed out how hierarchical patterns of relationship between men and women contributed to the power differential between teachers and students that made inappropriate sex possible. Senior Zen Center student Yvonne Rand advocated a firmer emphasis on the precepts, which were apparently not emphasized that much in the Japanese Zen tradition. In expressing her own grief at having been part of the secret-keeping mechanism, she said she felt it was very important to continually remind herself that she too was corruptible. That practice served as an antidote to placing all the blame on the perpetrator.

The public forum was a very helpful process for those who attended. One participant said,

[The] meeting raised my hopes and left me encouraged about the future of Buddhism in this country. Prepared by organizers who displayed an extraordinary sensitivity to the issues and to the members of the many communities affected by power abuse, the gathering allowed us to speak honestly and respond with compassionate acknowledgement to the feelings of students and others who are struggling with questions of relationships with teachers and sangha.<sup>19</sup>

During the open-mike period, people shared their personal experiences and questions about Buddhist practice as it had been affected by these sexual upheavals. To preserve confidentiality, the comments were not taped. The facilitator closed the session by honoring people's vulnerability and pain, reminding the group that this process was part of "reweaving the web that connects us in community."<sup>20</sup> After the forum, people talked about forming an ethics committee to take the next step beyond airing feelings by developing guidelines for practicing effectively with the third precept. This marked the point at which American Buddhist students made the struggle with sex their own, and not just the problem of the teacher.

#### DEVELOPING BUDDHIST CODES OF SEXUAL ETHICS

This is also the point where this paper begins to respond in depth to John Berthrong's paper presenting Christian perspectives on love and sex. I have not taken up the question of culture wars and sexual revolution, nor the problem of God as wholly other, since this would not be a Buddhist problem in viewing sexual abuse. However, I have told the story of what happens when there is not enough ethical reflection in a religious leader or a religious community. I believe the patterns of sexual abuse easily transcend religious denomination, as this Buddhist story illustrates quite vividly. As for casuistry, it seems that this is to some extent already a part of the Buddhist method for moral reflection. Thus, I am left with what is most interesting to me: how a community defines what is and is not acceptable to its members. Marie Fortune has served as a leading voice in this regard in the Christian community, and her work

has certainly been valuable to Buddhists sorting out the same issues. She defines criteria for consensual sex between adults based on the principle “love does no harm.” This is an almost exact rendition of the first and most foundational precept in Buddhism: “Do no harm.” So here is our common ground.

Fortune’s five rubrics, as summarized in Berthrong’s paper in this volume, pertain primarily to the persons who are choosing what they will consent to. To reiterate, these are (1) to choose peer relationships, thereby minimizing problems of power; (2) to seek authentic consent; (3) to care for the health and well-being of our sexual partners; (4) to share sexual pleasure and intimacy with concern for one’s partner’s needs as well as one’s own; and (5) to be faithful in sexual encounters.<sup>21</sup> Berthrong suggests that these guidelines evoke broader community reflections on the “nature of human flourishing at a cosmological level.” In particular, he raises the implications of pronatalist policies that derive from Christian philosophy toward sex. How does stewardship of personal health and well-being interface with stewardship of the wider planetary support system? Borrowing on a phrase from Ricouer, Berthrong suggests a “hermeneutics of restoration” that can apply to both sexual ethics and ecological ethics.

To see how Buddhists have picked up this hermeneutics of restoration, I want to look closely at the extensive work done by the San Francisco Zen Center to develop institutional guidelines for community members. After the 1990 Buddhist Peace Fellowship forum, two initiatives laid the ground work for the SFZC work. First, a neighboring Buddhist group, Spirit Rock Meditation Center, under the leadership of Jack Kornfield, decided to study these questions *before* they found themselves in hot water. As the board of directors undertook a major fundraising campaign to purchase land and build a retreat center in western Marin County, they appointed a subcommittee (called the “Ethics Committee”) to provide some guidance on teacher-student relations. At the same time, a number of teachers in the San Francisco Bay area asked the Buddhist Peace Fellowship to develop general Buddhist guidelines on sexual ethics that could address this issue broadly. The results of their work are available from each organization.<sup>22</sup>

The Spirit Rock document accepts the inevitability of conflict within the community, stating an open willingness “to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving interpersonal tensions.”<sup>23</sup> They define a Buddhist approach to conflict resolution as not being based on good or bad, blame or guilt. In contrast to Western Christian and legal traditions, the Buddhist way is to fully address the suffering of all concerned. They state that Buddhist practice should value “dialogue over silence, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, confession over accusation, and atonement over punishment.”<sup>24</sup> The document explains the role of the Ethics and Reconciliation Council, a group of seven respected practitioners appointed by the board of directors and including at least one teacher, one board member, one staff member, and one general community member. Though not stated explicitly, it seems clear that the ERC would be the group to address issues of sexual abuse or inappropriate sexual behavior, especially involving teachers and students.

As part of this process, the Spirit Rock teachers took the lead in developing a



“Teacher Code of Ethics.” In the opening statement, they acknowledge that “without the support of monastic vows and Asian customs, we have a need for clear Western guidelines [of conduct].” This points directly to some of the problems of cultural translation faced as Buddhism is being transplanted in the West: problems of monastic/lay practice, male/female relations, student/teacher expectations. The precept on refraining from sexual misconduct is the longest of the five, stating unequivocally that a “sexual relationship is never appropriate between teachers and students.”<sup>25</sup> They further agree that all teachers should “not use their teaching role to exploit their authority and position in order to assume a sexual relationship with a student.”<sup>26</sup> If a relationship does seem to be developing between a teacher and student, it is recommended that that form of the relationship be ended before a romantic (and presumably physical) relationship is begun, allowing a minimum of three months between the two.

San Francisco Zen Center’s ethics document is similar in structure, though even stronger than the Spirit Rock document. Because of the extreme suffering engendered by the Richard Baker episode, the Zen Center language is quite explicit in describing the potential for harm. Their statement regarding the third precept is, in full:

A disciple of Buddha does not misuse sexuality but rather cultivates and encourages open and honest relationships. The Zen Center sangha recognizes that sexuality is as much a part of the field of practice as any other aspect of our daily lives. Acknowledging and honoring our sexuality is part of creating an environment where conscious, mindful and compassionate relationships can be cultivated. Special care must be taken when people of unequal status or authority enter into a sexual relationship. In particular, there are two forms of relationships which can lead to great harm and confusion. Therefore both are considered a misuse of sexuality within our community.<sup>27</sup>

They then take up full legal responsibility as an institution, declaring it first a misuse of sexuality for any adult at the Zen Center to engage in sex with a minor. Echoing the Spirit Rock prohibition on teacher-student sexuality, Zen Center recommends a six-month neutral period after ending a teaching relationship and beginning a sexually active peer relationship. Further, they recommend that anyone in a formal religious leadership role with “clear advantages of influence in relationship to others” should discuss the appropriateness of their potential relationship with a practice leader.<sup>28</sup> The Zen Center also adds an extra precaution for new students, based on its experience at the residential centers, where people can be easily distracted by intriguing practice mates:

We have learned that it takes about six months for a new student to establish the foundation of his or her practice and to understand the complex nature of inter-relationships within the sangha. In order to protect a new student's opportunity to practice, we expect anyone who has been at Zen Center longer than six months to consult with a practice leader about a potential relationship

with a new student during the first six months of the new student's residency at Zen Center. Everyone coming to Zen Center in any capacity has the right to be free from sexual harassment. Continued expression of sexual interest after being informed that such interest is unwelcome is a misuse of sexuality.<sup>29</sup>

As with Spirit Rock, the ethics document grew out the work of an ethics committee, charged by the Zen Center abbots and appointed by the board of directors to develop an ethics policy. The process involved many hours of discussion with community members at all three practice places (City Center, Green Gulch, and Tassajara), continuing in an important way the healing begun by the earlier BPF forum. The statement was finalized and adopted in November 1996.

The Zen Center guidelines cover similar grievance procedures as Spirit Rock: filing a complaint, accepting a complaint, forming a grievance committee, investigating the complaint, and reporting the committee's findings. But they add to this the right to appeal a committee's decision to a second committee. They also recommend that a convener make "non-binding recommendations to both parties on steps they may take toward reconciliation among themselves and if necessary with the Zen Center sangha."<sup>30</sup> An appendix includes types of decisions that might be made by a grievance committee, including mediated resolution, reversal of an administrative action, private reprimand, or public censure. It is almost as if the list includes all the possible actions anyone at the Zen Center dreamed of to settle the situation with Richard Baker. (Of course, the Grievance Committee did not exist at the time, so none of these could be officially mandated.)

Perhaps the most significant piece of work undertaken by the Zen Center was the implementation of a procedure for hearing out the parties to a conflict. This reflects the recognition that silence on the part of the community was a critical factor in perpetuating the sexual abuse of the teacher. The principles listed as guidelines were learned from a specialist in mediation process who was also a concerned neighbor and member of the Zen Center. The five steps to this process (in abbreviated form) are:

1. Stating the Actual: A crucial aspect of conflict resolution, just as in Buddhist practice itself, is discriminating between our interpretations and opinions of an event and how the event was or is personally experienced. In part, this means not making general statements but rather sticking to the particulars of actual situations and the emotions experienced.
2. Being Heard: This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of a conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Much conflict arises and is perpetuated through a lack of mutual understanding; taking calm, deliberate, and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for reconciliation to begin.
3. Restating What Was Heard: To insure that everyone understands one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said,

highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate, and makes corrections.

4. Confession: Resolution and reconciliation is greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how they may have contributed to a conflict and then explains this to the other party.
5. Facilitation: It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or mediators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness providing a sense of calm and presence or may be an active mediator who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunities to speak.
6. Seeking Advice: In addition to or instead of inviting a facilitator to participate, it can be useful to seek advice for working informally with a conflict.<sup>31</sup>

I highlight these guidelines in detail here because they describe an ethical process to be used at the institutional level. In contrast to Marie Fortune's rubrics, which pertain primarily to the individual choice to engage in sexual activity, the Zen Center guidelines acknowledge the implications for an entire organization if its leaders engage in inappropriate sexual behavior. It is as if the entire organization were engaged in casuistry, motivated by the deep desire to not have to witness such extensive community-wide suffering again. I believe these guidelines could be used for addressing sexual abuse in other religious institutions as well. As the recent sex scandals in the Catholic church have shown, there is no shortage of sexual impropriety among religious organizations.

This *sangha*-wide work is profound in my mind because it is truly American Buddhism in evolution, becoming something very different than any other form of Buddhism known to history. Instead of relying almost entirely on the teacher or abbot or governing council (traditional to most forms of Buddhism), the Zen Center and Spirit Rock have developed ways for the community to take care of itself. It is also profound because it shows the long effort to try to reconcile what happened and transform the experience with Richard Baker into valuable learning on behalf of the organization. By taking the initiative to struggle through wording, process, legal requirements, and the spirit of the precepts, these Buddhist communities build a foundation of stability for future conflicts that may rise. Certainly there are no guarantees that sexually inappropriate behavior will not happen again in the future, but at minimum the ethics code provides a way to deal with the inevitably fallible nature of human beings deeply conditioned by sexuality, from head to toe.

Thus, my response to John Berthrong's exploration of love, lust, and sex from a Christian perspective is to highlight the evolution of Buddhist social attitudes as they have been codified in modern institutional form. Problems of lay/monastic, male/female practice still exist as Westerners take up the dharma, facing more deeply the challenges of being human. In a time when sexuality and its abuse are commonplace in the media, it is all the more challenging to create a platform of stability from which to build more respectful human relations. Marie Fortune's brave work has been an important part of this process. The painful efforts of California Buddhist *sanghas*

have also contributed to the evolution of social attitudes. By sharing responsibility for sexual behavior, teachers and students are less likely to get into quite as much trouble as they did in the 1980s. But I still wouldn't underestimate thousands of years of biological conditioning. Shunryu Suzuki, founding teacher of the San Francisco Zen Center, was once asked by a student about whether or not to engage in sex, and if so, how much. Suzuki gave only a short answer: "No sex? Problems. Sex? Problems." And the student was left to struggle with the full weight of this age-old question.

## NOTES

1. Suwanna Satha-Anand, "Buddhism on Sexuality and Enlightenment," in *Good Sex: Feminist Perspectives from the World's Religions*, edited by Patricia Beattie Jung, Mary E. Hunt, and Radhika Balakrishnan (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 113–124.
2. Adrian Forsyth, *A Natural History of Sex* (Shelburne, VT: Chapters Publishing Ltd, 1986).
3. Rita Carter, *Mapping the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 74.
4. Hammalawa Saddhatissa, *Buddhist Ethics: The Path to Nirvana* (London: Wisdom, 1987), pp. 88–92.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
6. David Kalupahana, *The Principles of Buddhist Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), p. 46.
7. Saddhatissa, p. 89.
8. Bhante Gunaratana, *Eight Mindful Steps to Happiness* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom, 2001), pp. 119–120.
9. Quoted in Michael Downing, *Shoes Outside the Door* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2001), p. 65.
10. To tell the story, Michael Downing contacted three years of interviews, talking to as many key players as would meet with him. He combed organizational documents, checked facts across sources, and compiled a fairly complete history of this tumultuous period in Zen Center's history. For the most part the book has been well received and accepted as an accurate representation of "what came down" during that time.
11. Robert Aitken, *The Mind of Clover* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1984), p. 41.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
13. Robert Aitken, *Taking the Path of Zen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1982), p. 83.
14. Aitken, *The Mind of Clover*, p. 37.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 43.
16. Thich Nhat Hanh, "Action and Compassion in the World," *Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter* 7, no. 3 (1985): 1–14. Quote from p. 13.
17. Thich Nhat Hanh, *For a Future to be Possible: Commentaries on the Five Wonderful Precepts* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), p. 30.
18. The full title is *Sex in the Forbidden Zone: When Men in Power—Therapists, Doctors, Clergy, Teachers, and Others—Betray Women's Trust* (Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher, 1989).
19. Sandy Boucher, "First Step, Important Opening," *Buddhist Peace Fellowship Newsletter*, spring 1991, p. 16.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
21. As discussed in John Berthrong, "Love, Lust, and Sex: A Christian Perspective," in this volume.
22. The "Safe Harbor" booklet can be ordered from the Buddhist Peace Fellowship, and the ethics guidelines from Spirit Rock are posted on their Web site, <[www.spiritrock.org](http://www.spiritrock.org)>.

23. See <[www.spiritrock.org/html/SRMC\\_EAR\\_Council.html](http://www.spiritrock.org/html/SRMC_EAR_Council.html)> (accessed 2 March 2004).
24. Ibid.
25. See <[www.spiritrock.org/html/teacher\\_ethics.html](http://www.spiritrock.org/html/teacher_ethics.html)> (accessed 2 March 2004).
26. Ibid.
27. See <[www.sfZC.org/Pages/Vision/vision.htm](http://www.sfZC.org/Pages/Vision/vision.htm)>, "Ethical Principles of San Francisco Zen Center," section on "The Essential Precepts" (accessed 2 March 2004).
28. Ibid.
29. Ibid.
30. See <[www.sfZC.org/Pages/Vision/vision.htm](http://www.sfZC.org/Pages/Vision/vision.htm)>, "Procedures for Grievance and Reconciliation."
31. Ibid.