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When, in 1992, a Tibetan Buddhist lama named Sogyal Rinpoche launched his book, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, in London, a celebratory party was held in a chic Kensington flat. The party was couture bohemian — thronged with the alternative intelligentsia, writers,

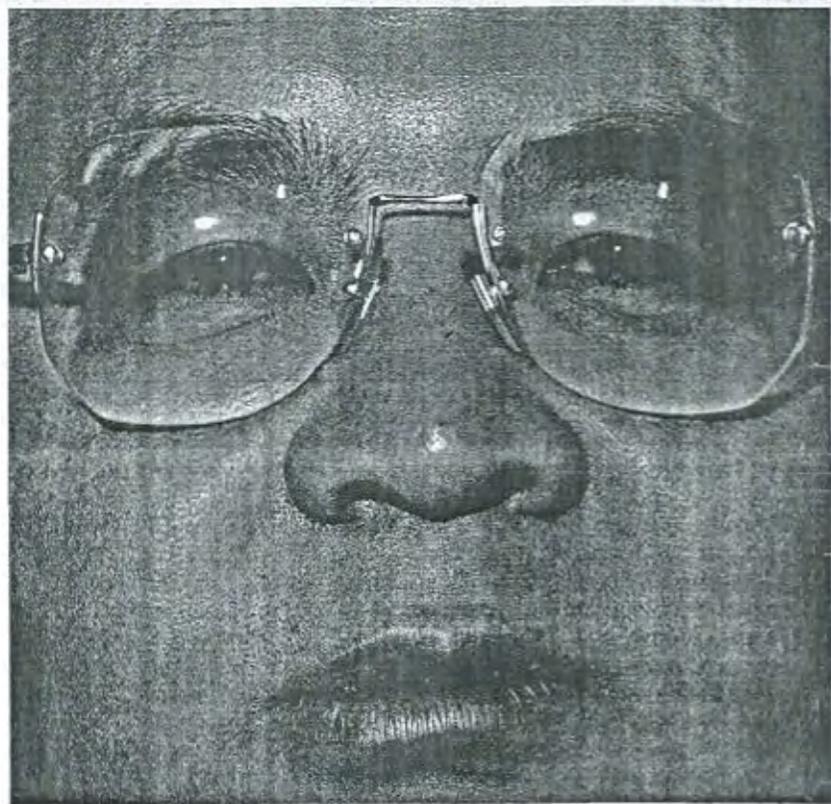
teachers and doctors, drawn by the promise of the exotic and the wise held out by a venerated teacher speaking from a centuries-old tradition. As the lama offered a few well-chosen words on the subject of compassionate living, the multitude of thirty- and fortysomethings dutifully sat cross-legged and cramped on the floor, limbs creaking and aching.

It was a small but portentous symbol of the discomforts that can arise when East meets West.

Few among the gathering, perhaps, would have predicted that the book, a contemporary interpretation of traditional Tibetan Buddhist ideas of dying, would go on to become an international bestseller. Yet three years on, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* has sold more than 250,000 copies around the world, 50,000 in Britain alone.

The book, to which the Dalai Lama wrote the

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foreword, struck a resonant chord in the growing Western debate about the nature of consciousness and our attitude to death.

It has been widely adopted by hospice organisations and doctors working with the dying; psychologists and philosophers have queued to commend it not simply for its insights into death, but as a complete blueprint for an ethical and compassionate life. John Cleese described it as 'one of the most helpful books I have ever read', and, introducing a talk in London by the Rinpoche, hailed his own first appearance as 'warm-up man for an incarnate lama'.

But while *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* has brought Sogyal Rinpoche international celebrity, the twinges of discomfort evident in that Kensington party have now blown up into controversy and scandal. Sogyal Rinpoche is presently on

a meditative retreat, which is why he has so far been unable personally to respond to a lawsuit which has been laid in a Californian court, seeking \$10 million damages on a sexual harassment charge.

The suit — which includes counts of fraud, assault and battery, infliction of emotional distress and breach of fiduciary duty — alleges that, using the justification of his spiritual status, the lama sexually and physically abused a female student, turning her against her husband and family. This, the charge alleges, was merely one example in a pattern of abuse against a number of women over the past 19 years.

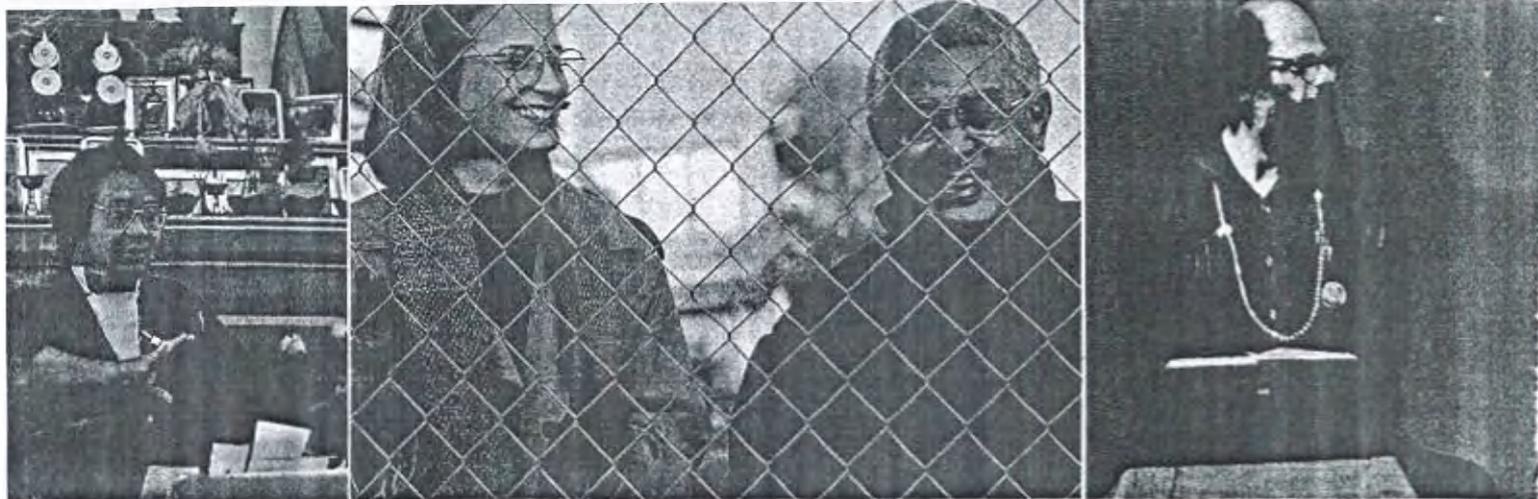
It is hard to convey the gravity of the accusations. Sogyal Rinpoche is widely regarded as one of the most gifted and enlightened teachers of Tibetan Buddhism in the West and, since the publication of *The Tibetan Book of Living*

and *Dying*, he is certainly one of the best known.

Rinpoche means 'precious one'. Sogyal is believed to be the incarnation of Tertön Sogyal, a Tibetan lama who was the teacher of the 13th Dalai Lama (the present one is the 14th) and who died in 1926.

Now in his late 40s, Sogyal Rinpoche was brought up in a monastery in Tibet. He left for India in 1958, a year before the popular Tibetan uprising against Chinese occupation that led to the Dalai Lama's flight into exile. He was educated by Jesuits at a Catholic school, then at university in Delhi, and at Trinity College, Cambridge, where he studied comparative religion, although he did not graduate.

He arrived in London in the late Seventies and began gathering a small group of students around him, and in 1981 the Rigpa Fellowship (Rigpa



From left, Sogyal Rinpoche in France, 1993, before charges of sexual harassment were filed; appearing in Bertolucci's *Little Buddha*. Above, one of Sogyal's predecessors, the eccentric

means 'innermost nature of mind') was founded to propagate his teachings. Rigpa now has several thousand followers, offices throughout Europe and North America, and teaching centres in Ireland, France and California. Sogyal Rinpoche — known as 'the laughing lama' because of his permanently cheery disposition — lectures around the world, and has even found fame as a film actor, appearing in Bernardo Bertolucci's *Little Buddha*.

The case against Sogyal is believed to be the first time that a Buddhist lama has ever faced public trial on sexual harassment charges. But it is merely one in a growing number of problems facing the lama's organisation. In Britain, the lawsuit has brought to a head growing concerns among some members of his organisation about the lama's sexual conduct, which have already resulted in a number of departures. In October 1992, a trustee resigned over Sogyal's sexual conduct, after suggesting to him that he should seek help, and writing to the Dalai Lama on the matter. She subsequently gave detailed information, maintaining the anonymity of those who had confided in her, at a meeting with trustees and other members of the Rigpa community.

In America, the case has prompted a fierce debate, not only about the role of Tibetan teachers in the West, and the conflicts between an ancient spiritual tradition and contemporary standards of secular behaviour, but also about the growing prevalence of sexual harassment cases in a society where people are increasingly encouraged to perceive themselves as victims of 'abuse' — whether by their parents, their teachers, their employers, or their religious leaders — and to seek redress in the newspapers or the courts.

On paper, the charge against Sogyal Rinpoche is a devastating one.

The accusation states that in June 1993, the woman, 'Janice Doe' (a pseudonym used in American court cases), in a state of bereavement following the death of her father, attended a retreat conducted by Sogyal in Connecticut. In a private meeting, Sogyal is alleged to have told 'Doe' that

through devotion and his spiritual instruction she could 'purify her family's karma', and that she should realise that 'he is Buddha and that all his actions are Buddha activity'.

The next evening, Sogyal invited the woman to his room where, allegedly, he seduced her. He later told her that her family had been healed 'by his love and kindness' and that this blessing 'could only be maintained through her unwavering devotion to him'.

Over a period of six months, the charge alleges, the woman was subjected to 'systematic indoctrination' designed to separate her from 'normal support systems', including her husband, family and friends, to make her completely dependent on Rinpoche and Rigpa for 'all physical, mental and emotional needs'. In that time, Sogyal allegedly 'physically and mentally abused' Doe, claiming that to be hit by a lama was 'a blessing' and requiring her to perform 'degrading acts' in order to 'bring her closer to a state of enlightenment'.

SOGYAL RINPOCHE has made no comment on the allegations, although the Rigpa Fellowship says that 'as far as we're aware, they have no foundation'. 'The charge portrays Sogyal's conduct in a light that is truly distorted,' says Jack Friedman, the California attorney for Rigpa. 'What we have here,' he says, 'is someone attempting to bring about changes in the way a religious organisation conducts itself, and the religious practice itself, through the law courts.'

Among some Buddhists there is a feeling that there is more to the case than meets the eye; that Rinpoche is the victim of a campaign in which allegations of sexual impropriety and the weapon of political correctness are being used to discredit him. Furthermore, they suggest that the lawsuit is part of a concerted attack on Tibetan Buddhist teaching in a tangled internecine dispute about who has the authority in Buddhism in the West — the oriental teachers who have promulgated the teachings over the past 30 years, or their erstwhile Western pupils who have now become teachers themselves.

Accusations of the misuse of power, of sexual or financial scandal, have become a commonplace in virtually every religion. The temptations of what is known in American evangelical circles as the 'Three Gs' — 'girls, gold and glory' — have brought down religious figures as various as the Reverend Jimmy Swaggart and Catholic priests (for whom the problem is as often boys as girls).

Eastern religious teachers have been no more immune to temptation. The past three decades have been littered with accounts of self-styled gurus and swamis who have risen in a blaze of glory — and sunk in disgrace.

Until now, however, Buddhism has been untainted by any major public scandal.

Sogyal Rinpoche is a lama, but not a celibate monk. He is unmarried, and there are, theoretically, no constraints on his private behaviour other than the third Buddhist precept not to engage in sexual misconduct.

The cornerstone of all Tibetan Buddhist practice is the relationship between an individual and a teacher. Within the Vajrayana, or tantric, tradition, to which Sogyal Rinpoche belongs, this relationship can often be one of extreme emotional and, in some cases, even physical intimacy, demanding the total trust of the pupil in the teacher's selfless motives — and total integrity on the part of the teacher not to abuse that trust.

It is on the complicated nature of this relationship that the charge against Sogyal Rinpoche partly hinges. Was he, a teacher, taking advantage of the trust placed in him by a student? At what point does individual responsibility in any sexual relationship begin and end? Is any relationship between a teacher — particularly a spiritual one — and a student by definition abusive? Or was this, more simply, a relationship between a man and a woman that ended not only in tears, but, in the vexed climate of sexual politics in America, in a lawsuit?

VAJRAYANA is sometimes characterised as the 'expressway to enlightenment' — a system of teachings by which the student can attain enlightenment within a single lifetime. Questions about the merits of this teaching and its appropriateness



Chogyam Trungpa, with his pupil, the beat poet Allen Ginsberg

to Western students have been a source of contention in America for more than 25 years — ever since the arrival in the west of a lama called Chogyam Trungpa, known as 'the roaring tiger of crazy wisdom', and the first man to establish Tibetan Buddhist centres in Britain and America.

Trungpa, too, taught in the Vajrayana tradition. A venerated lama in Tibet, he followed the Dalai Lama into exile in 1959. He made his way to Britain, and founded the Samye-Ling meditation centre in Scotland (nowadays dignified by visits from the likes of Lolicia Aitken), and became the first Tibetan to receive British citizenship. He married an 18-year-old English girl and then, in the late Sixties, moved to America, where he founded that country's first Tibetan meditation centre, in Colorado, and the Naropa teaching institute.

Trungpa was nobody's idea of the ascetic and saintly holy man. He walked with a pronounced limp, the result of a car accident when he drove into the window of a joke and novelty shop in Newcastle. Explaining to his pupil, the poet Allen Ginsberg, that 'I come from a long line of eccentric Buddhists,' he ran his organisation like a medieval court, surrounding himself with an elite bodyguard and sometimes amusing himself by dressing as a Grenadier Guard. He drank like a fish, and is said to have exercised virtual *droit de seigneur* over his female students — one of whom would later describe him as 'a spiritual stud'.

Trungpa died in 1987, from complications arising from alcoholism. Before his death he appointed an American, Osel Tenzin, as his successor. Osel died of Aids, after allegedly passing the HIV virus on to several of his students.

Among many Buddhists, Chogyam Trungpa was regarded as a wayward embarrassment — a

symptom of the dangers that can arise when Eastern teachers are exposed to the glamour of Western personality worship.

To his followers, however, he remains an exemplar of the tradition of 'crazy wisdom', where a teacher frequently acts with an apparently cavalier disregard for any moral, ethical or social propriety — 'completely shaking your programme' as one former pupil of Trungpa puts it — in order to force the pupil to realise the true nature of self.

'The real function of the guru,' Trungpa once said, 'is to insult you.'

Not all Trungpa's students followed his bidding with an easy conscience. 'A lot of people at Naropa would do anything that Trungpa told them to do without question,' one former student remembers, 'but they didn't always like it.'

But if some women did feel coerced into sexual relations for fear of incurring his disapproval, their disgruntlement was never expressed in the courts; in the Seventies, the legal concept of sexual harassment was yet to come.

In the years since Trungpa's death, there have been a number of scandals within the Buddhist community about teachers' sexual behaviour. These have almost never made the press. But they have provoked an increasingly heated debate among Western Buddhists about how Buddhism should be taught in the West in general, and about the sexual ethics of teachers in particular.

In recent years the Dalai Lama is known to have received a stream of complaints from Western women students alleging misbehaviour among teachers, both Western and Tibetan, and to have grown increasingly concerned that errant teachers were bringing Buddhism into disrepute. Sogyal Rinpoche is said to have been the subject of several complaints in the past; and it is claimed that the Dalai Lama has warned him privately about his conduct.

When, in 1993, an organisation called the Network for Western Buddhist Teachers met with the Dalai Lama at his home in Dharamsala, India, to discuss Buddhist teaching in the West, the sexual ethics of teachers was high on the agenda.

In the course of that meeting the Dalai Lama agreed that miscreant teachers threatened to bring the whole teaching of Buddhism into disrepute. Misbehaviour should be publicised, he said, and errant teachers made 'regretful and embarrassed' about their conduct.

'As the expression goes,' he added, 'someone who has already fallen down cannot help someone else stand up.'

Following the meeting in Dharamsala, the Network issued an 'open letter' to the Western Buddhist community, laying down a 'code of

conduct' for teachers in the West. This stated that 'students should not hesitate to publicise any unethical behaviour of which there is irrefutable evidence... irrespective of other beneficial aspects of [the teacher's] work.'

No matter what level of spiritual attainment a teacher has attained, the letter went on, 'no person can stand above the norms of ethical conduct.'

Despite his pronouncement in Dharamsala, however, the Dalai Lama declined to give his official imprimatur to the new code.

'I think the Dalai Lama felt any kind of code was premature,' says Robert Thurman, professor of Indo-Tibetan Buddhist Studies at Columbia University, who was an observer at the conference. 'And the teachers were not representative of the Buddhist community as a whole.'

The new code has driven a wedge of disagreement through the Buddhist community in the West. Sogyal Rinpoche's Rigpa Fellowship and Vajradharma, the organisation founded by Chogyam Trungpa, are among several Buddhist groups who have not been signatories to the code. They argue that they represent a Buddhist teaching stretching back hundreds of years, and do not need a self-appointed group of 'moral police' dictating how they should practise.

'I doubt the motivation of those who drew up the code,' says Judith Simmer-Brown of Vajradharma. 'I think there is a power struggle going on to undermine Asian teachers and put them down, and I don't want to be part of that.'

Supporters of Sogyal Rinpoche say that in attempting to make Buddhism 'politically correct', the code is actually challenging the 'special relationship' between teacher and student that is the very basis of Vajrayana practice; that the code is, in effect, an open invitation to a McCarthyite witch-hunt of Tibetan teachers.

This idea of a code of practice has become a central part of the court case against Sogyal Rinpoche. Theodore Philips, the attorney for Janice Doe, says that his client's motivation for bringing the case is not simply one of personal reparation, but to force the introduction of a code of conduct for teachers, 'to prevent future abuse'.

In Vajrayana Buddhism the relationship between the pupil and teacher demands a surrender of self that can seem anathema to Western ideas of individuality, equality and free will.

Yet as one authority, Stephen Butterfield, has written in his book on Vajrayana, *The Double Mirror*: 'Without the guru, enlightenment is impossible. The guru is the Buddha. Anything that happens to you, whether good or bad, is the guru's blessing and compassion. If it is good, be

Over a period of six months, the charge says, the woman was subjected to 'systematic indoctrination' designed to separate her from 'normal support systems', including her husband, family and friends, to make her completely dependent on Rinpoche for 'all physical, mental and emotional needs'

grateful to the guru; if it is bad, then it helps to wake you up and so you should also be grateful to the guru.

It is a relationship of 'no boundaries', in which sex may sometimes, but by no means necessarily, play a part.

Judith Simmer-Brown of Vajradharu, and a lecturer at the Naropa Institute, describes the teacher-student relationship as 'profound, groundless, and naked, whether or not it is a sexual relationship. It can be insulting, intimidating, gratifying, but it is always intimate.'

Imposing any kind of external code of ethics on such a relationship, says Simmer-Brown, is as 'inappropriate as imposing a code on marriage'.

'A genuine teacher-student relationship always has an element of passion in it, in the sense that it is a totally encompassing relationship,' says Rita Gross, Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at the University of Wisconsin.

'There is a way in which one falls in love with one's teacher if it really is on a deep level of connection. Therefore it is not surprising that sometimes these relationships become erotic and sexual.'

'I don't believe the guru-student relationship is so egalitarian that it will always be exploitative,' she adds. 'The question is whether a student has the wisdom to know how to handle it and for the teacher to know when the student is not capable of that level of involvement.'

According to Tibetan teachings, students should not enter lightly into such a relationship. The Dalai Lama has suggested it can take as long as 15 years for a student to determine the right teacher.

'There are certain safeguards that are built into Asian cultures that have been lost in Buddhism coming to the West,' says Yvonne Rand, a California-based teacher of Buddhism for 20 years. 'American "seekers" often have a capacity to give themselves away to a spiritual teacher or guide almost without question. People from Japan and from Tibet are amazed that we can be so gullible.'

The Dalai Lama has been quite specific on the subject of tantric teachings. Historically, he says, there have been teachers who may have engaged in conduct 'which appears disgraceful, but which may have had some kind of deep realisation or knowledge of the long-term benefit to the person involved'.

He has suggested that a good test of the qualifications of a tantric master who is beyond attach-



Private warning: the Dalai Lama

According to Tibetan teachings, a student should not enter lightly into a relationship with a guru. It can take up to 15 years

ment and the temptations of self-gratification is whether the master can drink alcohol and urinate with equal indifference. Asked recently which Tibetan teachers were of a sufficiently high level to do this, the Dalai Lama replied, 'As far as I know - zero.'

CENTRAL TO the allegations against Sogyal Rinpoche is a complex argument about the conflict between two disparate cultures. How does a religion dating back hundreds of years, and coming from a country rooted in feudalism, adapt itself to modern society where political correctness is high on the agenda?

Some Western Buddhists believe that Tibetan teachers, coming from a society which is 'patriarchal, feudal and misogynistic', are inevitably so burdened by the baggage of their own cultural traditions that they cannot be trusted to be sensitive to the nuances of politically-correct America.

Others suggest that the lawsuit is evidence that nothing is sacred: that in America today everything - even religious practice - must measure up to the require-

ments of political correctness, in a climate where there is always ambiguity over whether sexual harassment suits are instruments of justice, or simply of revenge.

Few are surprised that in a climate where the whole question of 'power abuse' has galvanised America at every level of public life, and where debate rages about what sort of controls should be placed on putative 'authority' figures - from psychotherapists to attorneys - it should now be a Tibetan lama who is facing a sexual harassment charge. Nor does it come as any surprise to many within the Buddhist community that the charge should have been directed against Sogyal Rinpoche.

'Rinpoche is a bachelor, and he's free to indulge his desires to date girls,' says Robert Thurman. 'People knew about that, but until this incident it didn't create any huge stink. Nobody was that concerned about it, although people were nervous it could lead to some problem, because it's kind of careless.'

In the wake of the American lawsuit, however, women in Britain who have hitherto remained silent have now begun to talk about their experiences: 'Sogyal Rinpoche's need for a partner is not in question,' says one former student. 'Rather, the issue concerns the inappropriateness of sexual relationships with his students. In the West it is not

considered ethical to engage in sex within the confines of a pastoral or teacher-student relationship where there are clear power imbalances.'

'Within the practice, you are encouraged to view everything the lama does as a sacred act, as the actions of a Buddha, beyond good and bad. And this creates potential ground for abuse of trust, and sexual abuse, particularly when no one is quite clear what "the rules" are, because of the differing Tibetan and Western cultural norms, and where the philosophy of "no boundaries" is being advocated. It is questionable how far women were able to exercise free will in the matter when they felt obligated by Sogyal Rinpoche's entreaties that he needed the inspiration of women to help with his teachings.'

'There is little room for a student to dissent, because to question the master is considered to indicate a lack of faith. In a Western context it becomes very close to a relationship of dominance and submission.'

One student told the *Telegraph Magazine* that when Sogyal initiated a sexual relationship with her, she felt she had no choice but to comply.

'It's a relationship that you haven't chosen, agreed to or discussed,' she says. 'Because he was my spiritual teacher, I trusted that whatever he asked was in my best interests. You're chosen, which makes you feel special. You want to help the teachings, you want to progress on the spiritual path. By sleeping with the teacher you get a closeness to him which everyone is banking after. You want to be a "good student". It's a sort of submission.'

'I saw it as part of the teachings about the illusory nature of experience and emotions. But in fact it caused me a lot of pain that I wasn't able to dissolve.'

Another woman described how Rinpoche would single her out for special attention at retreats and teachings over a period of some two years: 'While I knew that he had relationships with women, I never thought that he was interested in me in any more than a fatherly way,' she says. When, at length, Rinpoche made a sexual advance to her, she says that she felt 'confused - surprised but flattered. I thought that somehow I was special, and that he was choosing me because of my special qualities.'

'The few women practitioners that Rinpoche had held up as a model were the wives or consorts of great and famous teachers. He made me feel that I had been chosen as his consort. Besides, I had taken him as my guru, and according to the teachings I aspired to see all his actions as those of an enlightened being. I trusted him completely, and trusted that if we had a sexual relationship it would ultimately benefit me.'

Shortly after the relationship began, however, she was distressed to hear from a friend about three other students with whom Sogyal was having relations at the same time.

'I was surprised and hurt. But then I decided that

I had to let go of such "negative emotions" and accept whatever Rinpoche was doing, since he was my teacher.'

Her understandings of the teachings, she says, did not help her resolve her confusion. But while her doubts grew, she did not feel 'justified' in expressing them to Sogyal.

'I told myself that on an absolute level Rinpoche was helping beings and that what I felt was not important. Buddhist practice was the most important and wonderful thing in my life and being this close to a master was said to be an incredible blessing.'

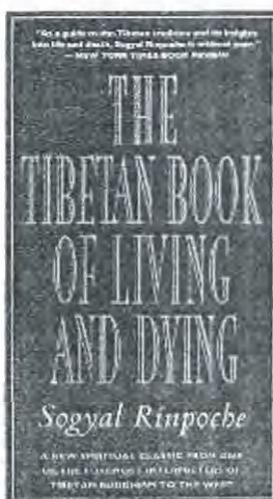
If the teachings could not help her with her confusion, neither, she says, did the community of practitioners. 'All of the older students, the people I went to for advice, told me repeatedly that I must "abandon my discriminating mind and use my wisdom mind" in dealing with Rinpoche,' she says. 'Every time I tried to do that I ended up doing what he wanted and feeling bad about it later.'

She says that although she believed in the teachings and wished to continue with her Buddhist practice, she eventually came to a point where she was unable to continue her sexual relationship with Sogyal. On several occasions, she made her feelings known, 'but I began to see that however much he tried, he was incapable of controlling himself. The only way that I could remain in his presence was constantly to refuse to allow him to touch me — which was exhausting and demeaning.'

Eventually she felt she had no option but to leave Rinpoche and the community altogether: 'I came to the conclusion that, in effect, Sogyal Rinpoche had used the teachings to attempt to keep me in a sexual relationship with him — one that I did not want to be in. I recognised that I was emotionally wounded, that my self-esteem was low, and that I no longer trusted myself or the spiritual path I had chosen.'

Another former student talks of the 'deep distress and confusion' felt by women students who have had relations with Sogyal Rinpoche. 'The worst thing you can do is to go against the lama, or speak ill of him. The traditional teachings say that if you disobey the Vajra master's commands, then you are breaking your spiritual link, harming the master and shortening his life, which would result in endless suffering.'

'But within the Vajrayana tradition as it is taught in the West, the master is not accountable to his



The distress felt by students who have had sexual relations with spiritual teachers can be analogous to incest

students, and there is no court of appeal for the students. Some people told me they were too scared to speak out within the organisation about this; and those who attempted to were told it was "their problem".'

June Campbell, a lecturer at the Open University at Napier University, Edinburgh and the author of a forthcoming book about the female identity in Tibetan Buddhism, says that the feeling of distress and confusion experienced by students who have had sexual relations with spiritual teachers can be analogous to incest.

'Women may not speak out because they are fearful. They are scared they will undermine the community — which of course they will — like a child who fears it will destroy the family. There is the fear of not being believed; the fear of putting down a wonderful system of beliefs; the fear of being the sole voice.'

Women who find themselves in this situation, adds one former Rigpa member, 'stop knowing how to perceive things, how to behave or how to respond; they lose their sense of reality and of personal integrity. They no longer know what the truth is.'

The community response to disclosure is shock and denial, because they cannot tolerate the shattering of their idealised picture of the perpetrator.

'I know women who have had to undergo therapy because nobody inside the community would take their distress seriously. They feel an enormous sense of betrayal, both by the teacher and the community.'

One woman who spoke to the *Telegraph Magazine* said: 'This is not a question of criticising the Buddhist teachings, which have enormous depth, wisdom and compassion, nor of attacking spirituality. The Dalai Lama says we should "respect the common perspective of what is right and wrong". This is taking issue with the actions of a teacher which have brought harm to others and himself.'

TRUSTEES of the Rigpa Fellowship in London have declined to make any comment, in light of the American court case. However, one member of Rigpa said that Sogyal 'does not use sexual relations as part of his teachings at all. He is not married. He's not a monk. And in many ways he lives just like an ordinary person.' The member declined to comment on any allegations about Sogyal's sexual relationships. 'The Vajrayana

teachings say that following a teacher closely is very important. But practically speaking, nobody is ever compelled to do anything they don't want to do as part of the teaching.'

The member added that in the light of rumours and allegations about sexual misconduct, the Rigpa Fellowship in London was 'actively involved in looking into these matters closely, so that people who are upset can talk about these issues and air their concerns.'

This initiative, the member said, is to help Rigpa students who may be concerned about allegations against the lama. Asked whether the initiative included people who themselves had suffered distress as a result of a sexual relationship with Rinpoche, the source replied that Rigpa was trying to find 'the right pathway to engage the confidence of people who may feel distressed for whatever reason and encourage the process of healing'.

Sogyal Rinpoche, the member said, 'is fully aware of everything that's involved.'

'This whole teaching is about compassion, and I'm sure the thing Rinpoche really wants to see is for anybody who may feel upset to be able to come to resolve their feelings. His only desire would be that people find the resolution and happiness that is evading them at the moment.'

Senior students of Sogyal Rinpoche say that they fear that Janice Doe's lawsuit in America may be part of a deliberate campaign to undermine the lama and his organisation.

'Sogyal is a very successful, very charismatic teacher,' says one Rigpa member. 'He's attracted a large following — which could, in itself, be a cause of jealousy.'

They say that in recent months the lama has been the subject of an apparently orchestrated campaign of whispers spread throughout the Buddhist community, by letter and on the Internet, going so far as to allege that Sogyal is an imposter, and that the 'real' Sogyal Rinpoche is still in Tibet; even that he is not a Tibetan at all but an American Indian.

'There is a group of Western Buddhist teachers who feel they should now be honoured and respected themselves as teachers, and who represent a very puritanical tendency,' says Bob Thurman. 'I think they're envious of the Asian teachers, who maybe misbehave a little bit around the edges, but who are more respected than they are. I'm not saying there is a conspiracy. But there are certainly people who have been abetting this attack.'

Yvonne Rand is one teacher who has been most outspoken on the subject of Vajrayana teachings. Rand says that in her capacity as a Buddhist teacher, she has counselled 'a number' of women who claim to have had sexual relationships with Sogyal. While acknowledging that 'Janice Doe' has had the support of an informal network of Buddhist teachers in bringing her lawsuit, Rand denies that there is any conspiracy against Sogyal:

'I would be extremely upset if that was the case. I think that the well-being of him and the community is as important as the well-being of the practitioner. But at the same time, this is a clear case of the abuse of trust by a student in a teacher.'

'I have spoken to Janice Doe. She was completely unfamiliar with Buddhism and with what it would mean to practise with a spiritual teacher. She was quite vulnerable and went to the retreat with great trust. She was very typical of women who come to spiritual practice with a certain amount of personal confusion and who are looking for healing.'

SO WHAT actually occurred between Sogyal Rinpoche and Janice Doe? Was it all a terrible misunderstanding: a religious teacher doing what he felt was necessary for the pupil, and a pupil failing to understand a relationship of 'no boundaries'? Was it an unscrupulous man taking advantage of a naive and trusting woman's emotional vulnerability? Or was it simply a love affair which has ended in a bitter recrimination?

'A lot of the behaviour we see from male Asian teachers clearly comes out of a patriarchal society,' says Helen Twokorv, the editor of the American Buddhist quarterly magazine, *Tricycle*. 'It is the same behaviour that women see in our own society and we don't like it.'

'But at the same time, I do think that women over 18 are old enough to know what they're doing. I think it is a disaster in America the way we treat grown-up people as if they are children. This thing of the "abused child within" is a bunch of bull. People have to take responsibility for their own behaviour.'

Yvonne Rand disagrees. Women speaking out is not a symptom of a victim mentality, she argues. 'A victim mentality is one where the person who feels abused remains silent.'

'Entering into a polemic about "victims" and "abusers" can be yet another subtle way of denying the reality of harm that takes place,' says one former Rigpa member. 'The danger is that the people who are most likely to be forgotten in the debate are the women themselves who have experienced suffering and distress.'

'This is not about political correctness, it's about spiritual and personal integrity. Sadly, I'm not at all surprised that Janice Doe's only recourse for a fair hearing is the law courts.'

IT IS LIKELY to be some months before an American court must rise to the complicated challenge of deciding exactly how esoteric Tibetan traditions are to be interpreted in the light of contemporary American sexual politics. 'In the climate of American morality today, where even the Catholic church is being humiliated over sexual abuse charges, it is going to be extremely hard for a jury to buy a religious justification for sexual activity,' says Ram Dass, an American spiritual teacher of many years' standing. 'In America today, there is only lust or family values.' And the Janice Doe case, Ram Dass suggests, is about neither of these things.

In an article in a recent edition of *View*, the magazine of the Rigpa Fellowship, written before the Janice Doe charge was laid, Sogyal Rinpoche warns his readers how, in grasping the wrong view of things, it is easy to lose sight of where ignorance ends and truth begins. 'Once we are wrongly convinced then we find no end of doubts, distortions and misconceptions to feed our wrong convictions,' he writes.

'Like a demented lawyer we obsessively marshal our arguments, weighing all the evidence in our favour and suppressing any other explanations, especially the truth... Our memory becomes selective, choosing to recall only the darkness, pain and confusion and erasing anything that... could point towards happiness and truth. By now, our wrong views and convictions have a power and energy entirely of their own. We can no longer recognise the truth if it stares us in the face or hammers on our door.'

The truth of Janice Doe's allegations remains for a court to decide in black and white. The problem is, as one Buddhist teacher says, 'In Buddhism, there are only shades of grey.'

Additional reporting by Claire Scobie



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PRESS RELEASE

In California, a lawsuit has recently been brought against Rigpa Fellowship USA, and its spiritual director Sogyal Rinpoche, who is author of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. The suit alleges that Rigpa is a cult, and that Sogyal Rinpoche is guilty of fraud, assault and battery.

Rigpa is unable to comment on the allegations, as we would have wished, due to legal proceedings. However we would like to point out that Sogyal Rinpoche and his teachings have moved many thousands of people, women and men, and there are many people who can say how he has helped them transform their lives in a very positive way. Many of the most eminent lamas of Tibetan Buddhism have recognised Sogyal Rinpoche as an authentic master, and we have every confidence that this is so.

February 22nd 1995