

To: Aleacia Buchanan

REDACTED

Swami Ahimsadhara
 Rocklyn Ashram
 393 Dean Barkstead Rd
 Creswick
 Vic 3364

26th March 2016

Dear Alecia,

Thank you for the letter you sent to Swami Kriyatma and others. It has been forwarded to me for reply. The reason for this is that I am part of a task force that has recently been set up to help Mangrove ashram work towards full reconciliation with those who suffered abuse under the administration of Swami Akhandananda. Within that task force I have been given the role of liaising with those who were abused.

I was very pleased to see your letter because I was aware that since the Facebook interaction was closed down there has been no easy avenue for communication. The task force only formed a week ago and to re-establish communication is a top priority that was about to happen. You have helped that to happen. I appreciate your concerns and want to begin the process of addressing them. As you are representing a group, we can now start that dialogue. Let me tell you about the task force.

The name of the task force is 'Working Together'. This expresses our hope and aim; that the current Satyananda Yoga community can work with you towards our common goal. The task force is separate but linked to Mangrove. It was felt that it was now appropriate that a dedicated group move the matter forward rather than the Mangrove administration, which has laid the foundations for this process. So far the group has been establishing itself and managing the situation that arose due to the emails from Bhakti Manning and Mary Smith, which went to more than 100 teachers. This, as you will understand, was urgent. Our attention is now turning back to the survivors of abuse, where it should remain.

Before I continue, I would like to introduce myself properly, because I feel it's important that you know who I am and what my history with the ashram is.

I am at Rocklyn ashram for a couple of months at the moment but am based in Hobart where I managed the Hobart Yoga and Meditation Centre from 2003-2011. From 2012 to the end of 2013 I lived in the ashram in Munger, working directly with Swami Niranjana. I now have no formal role other than the one I have just assumed with this task force. I work as a yoga teacher and writer.

My association with Satyananda Yoga has been since 1975 when I was just 14. I first went to Mangrove in January 1976 and met Swami Satyananda and Swami Niranjana at the World Yoga Convention in Sydney later that year. Swami Akhandananda was my meditation teacher at Manly ashram in '76 and I sometimes went to Mangrove for weekends. I never had a close association with him. I knew SHISHY but not well. She attended the same high school as me, but was a few years older. Her mother, AQA was one of my first yoga teachers and I respected her a great deal. From 1977 I stepped back from my involvement with the ashram due to uncertainty about placing such trust in a 'guru', especially when I did not really know that person.

I did not return until 1996, when the next convention was held in Sydney. At that time I reconnected with Swami Niranjana whom I had known as a teenager at

Mangrove. I observed the way the organization was now being run, and came to Rocklyn when Swami N visited in 2001. I listened carefully to his talks, and discerned a modern, deeply intelligent and compassionate approach to his mission. I decided to return and he initiated me into sannyasa later that year.

In the meantime I had married, had two children and a career in the media. In 2003 I was asked to manage the Satyananda Yoga Centre in Hobart, a not-for-profit organization founded on the work of karma sannyasins. All who were associated were honest, hard working, sincere and kind. These were the qualities I expected in such a group, which I fostered in my role as manager and which I continue to work for in my life as well as within Satyananda Yoga.

From 2003 until the present, one of the jobs I feel most privileged to have had was teaching Vietnam War veterans. Many of these men had suffered with post-traumatic stress disorder or other mood disorders for decades. Satyananda Yoga has played a powerful role in their ability to manage in life and to recover from the devastating effects of the traumas they suffered. I am sure that this work taught me as much as it taught them: I valued their courage, their openness to healing, their maturity in accepting and letting go of the past and the friendships we have shared. I learned about the effects of deep trauma from past atrocities and that recovery is possible.

That's enough about me. Please feel free to ask any questions that you have – I hope that our relationship can be an honest and trusting one, as that is essential if we are to succeed in nurturing the process of seeking for peace that has begun.

To help us further the aim of guiding and nurturing reconciliation and healing I would like to talk with you. I need to know who you are representing and speaking on behalf of so that we can be effective in hearing from as many of you as possible.

We are starting to plan the details of the Apology Day. We would like to consult with you so that we most appropriately respond. I think you will be pleased to know that the day for the apology will be Easter Sunday. We agree with you that it should hold a prominent place in the 40th anniversary program at Mangrove and be at a time when as many people as possible are available. We hope that someone can represent those who suffered, even if many of them can't be there. Perhaps you are able to come? If you are available I will request that your travel be funded by Mangrove.

Easter Sunday is a day that represents transformation: making the apology on that day will bring that energy of transformation into our efforts. We are in the process of drafting the apology and planning how to make it public beyond the Mangrove ceremony. This needs to be a lasting apology.

The apology is one very important and personal aspect of the process but there are other initiatives that have been progressively put in place to prevent any recurrence of what happened. These are in line with organizational best practice and they are listed here for you:

1. Complete audit and review of all compliance issues. Amongst other things, the audit revealed that the organisation was fully compliant with all statutory child protection protocols
2. Creation of new employment/volunteer agreements to ensure everyone is properly designated. This has now been fully implemented

3. Creation of Ashram Policy & Procedure Guide outlining the policies regarding workplace behaviour, bullying, harassment, grievance management, discipline etc. including Social Media. This has been fully implemented and operational for the last 12 months.
4. Creation of Work Health and Safety guidelines. First stage is operational and will be fully operational from the end of May, including resident induction via e-learning portal.
5. E-learning Portal induction programs will be available for all new residents from the end of May.
6. A review of all child protection systems, and compliance with new systems introduced in 2012, are fully compliant (and exceed) the NSW Commission requirements. This means that everyone who lives in the ashram as a resident has been cleared to work with children.
7. It is also worth noting that the ashram has a matrix management mechanism in place that ensures there is no longer a concentration of power in any one individual.

This means that the ashram is continuing with its longterm application of Best Practice systems. Accordingly, someone who feels they have been subject to inappropriate conduct has a confidential mechanism available to them to escalate and resolve. There is also a discipline policy available to properly deal with the “offender”.

To facilitate communication between the task force and those who suffered abuse, an email address has been set up. The emails will be read and responded to by me, with reference to the task force as needed. Be assured that all correspondence with the task force is confidential. We are sending you this both electronically and in hard copy.

I feel that we are making a strong and united start and would like to continue this effort in cooperation with you and those you speak for. If you are open to working with me and the task force, please let me know when is a convenient time and I will call you.

Warm regards,
Ahimsadhara

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