SUBMISSIONS ON BEHALF OF JYOTI, APK, APL, APA, APH AND TIM CLARK

ROYAL COMMISSION INTO INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES TO CHILD SEX ABUSE

CASE STUDY 21: SATYANANDA YOGA ASHRAM

Background

1. Jyoti, APK, APL, APA, APH and Tim Clark were all child residents of Satyananda Yoga Ashram at Mangrove Mountain for various periods in the late 1970s and the 1980s. All entered the ashram as children under the age of 18 with the support or consent of their parents. Their accounts have several parallels. Some left troubled family lives and circumstances. Tim Clark states his family “were very poor and lived in a caravan...I got into a bit of trouble at school...My dad thought it was a good idea for me to start doing yoga”. APA’s states “my mother was suffering from anxiety and depression. She sought help through yoga to manage this”.  

2. All seemed taken with the peaceful environment of the ashram. Jyoti states “On my first visit to the Ashram, I fell in love with the environment. I loved the outdoor setting and self-sufficient lifestyle and I wanted to be a yoga teacher one day”. All seemed to be seeking “a new way of life”. Some of these parents poured their financial resources into the ashram.

3. During their time at the ashram, the children were under the care of Shishy. Despite describing herself as Akhandananda’s “handmaiden”, Shishy was known as the partner of the ashram’s founder, Akhandananda, and was understood to have a position in the management of the ashram. APA states: “The directors (those in charge) of the Ashram at the time were Swami Akhandananda and Shishy”.  

4. In her evidence, Shishy agreed that she held such a position:

“To the extent that anyone could be second-in-charge, I was – I guess the way I would describe my position honestly is that I was high up on the ladder doing what I was told. I was probably the highest one up on the ladder doing what I was told”.

5. Shishy agreed that she was a figure that some of the children worshipped:

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1 Ex 21-0013, ‘Statement of Tim Clark’ STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [5]-[6]
2 Ex 21-0007, ‘Statement of APA’ STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [6]
3 Ex 21-0004, ‘Statement of Jyoti’ STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [8]
4 Ex 21-0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [5]
5 Ex 21-0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [6]
6 T11245.4
7 Ex 21-0007, ‘Statement of APA’ STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [9]
8 T11233.38-42
"Q: Did you recognise at the time that you were living with those children that they worshipped you – some of them did?
A: Worshipped – yes, I – retrospectively, definitely I can see that. At the time, I think that – I think it was all part of the climate that was existing there, that it was almost taken for granted in some kind of a way that, you know, this was acceptable." 9

6. Some of the children viewed her as a mother figure. APA states:

"As a child I had a keen longing to be loved and accepted. Because of this, I adored Shishy and did everything I could to please her. She very quickly became a mother figure to me, as she was to the many children living at the ashram. I practically worshipped the ground that she walked on. Like the other children, I did everything I could to stay in her favour". 10

7. Others did not get along with Shishy and were wary of her violence and manipulative ways:

"Shishy and I never got along. I don’t think she liked me and in return I did not like her...I felt very isolated as a result". 11

8. The parents of the children were eventually distanced from them. Those parents who had moved to the ashram with their children were moved to other ashrams. 12 They were discouraged from maintaining relationships with their children. APL states:

"I was told a lot that my parents were inadequate and unnecessary to my life as a swami. Shishy would tell me things like, "Your mother is toxic and poisonous. You shouldn’t listen to her. She is wrong about everything" and "Mothers’ attachments to their own children is stupid. It is better if we don’t have mothers". 13

9. APH’s experience was similar:

"The convention at the Ashram was that we called our parents by their spiritual names, not ‘mum’ and ‘dad’, and I still do not address them as ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ today. I yearned for a closeness with my parents and I think that neediness made me an easy target for abuse". 14

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9 T11174.44-11175.1
10 Ex 21-0007, ‘Statement of APA’ STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [14]
11 Ex 21-0004, ‘Statement of Jyoti’ STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [14]
12 Ex 21-0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [7]
13 Ex 21-0005, ‘Statement of APL’ STAT.0426.001.0001_R at [18]
14 Ex 21-0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [7]
10. Others were discouraged or prevented from visiting their parents outside the ashram:

"My parents visited me regularly, but when I spent time with them Shishy would treat me meannly and ignore me and leave me out of fun activities. Sometimes I would sneak away to visit my parents but that would often result in a beating for leaving the Ashram".\(^{15}\)

All experienced significant emotional distress at being separated from their families as children. Those who did not get along with Shishy felt further isolated.\(^{16}\)

11. Shishy and Akhandananda eventually took legal guardianship of the children, mainly for financial reasons. In her evidence, Shishy stated:

"Q: Did you ever sign any documents for guardianship of the children?
A: Yes. I did, actually. It was always about money. No child endowment or money could ever be gotten from, whatever it was then, social security or something, without – you know, for the children that stayed in the ashram, without having some piece of paper to say that that was possible. So, yes, that did happen".\(^{17}\)

They received welfare endowments on behalf of their wards. Shishy became a Justice of the Peace and validated guardianship papers herself.\(^{18}\)

12. All former residents have given evidence that they experienced grave sexual, physical and emotional abuse at the hands of Akhandananda and Shishy. Shishy was reportedly aware of the abuse as it was taking place, in certain instances was present in the same room during the sex abuse, was complicit in the abuse, and behaved in a sexualised way around the children herself.\(^{19}\)

13. Both Shishy and Akhandananda also physically abused the children. They were known to be violent and gave the children regular beatings. Akhandananda at times did so with what was referred to as a "kundalini stick". Children did not receive sufficient food and clothing.

**Child Sex Abuse**

*Akhandananda’s abuse of children*

\(^{15}\) Ex 21-0007, 'Statement of APA' STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [11]

\(^{16}\) Ex 21-0004, 'Statement of Jyoti' STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [14]

\(^{17}\) T11215.5-12

\(^{18}\) T11266.40-45

\(^{19}\) Ex 21-0013, 'Statement of Tim Clark' STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [17]
14. Jyoti, APK, APL, APA and APH have all given evidence that they were sexually abused by Akhandananda at different times and in different degrees.

15. The accounts of the female victims have distinct similarities. Most reported receiving special attention Akhandananda prior to arriving at the ashram, or in the early days of their stay:

"...Swami Akhandananda Saraswati (Akhandananda), who was the head of the ashram, or the guru figure, paid me a lot of attention. He kept saying to me, 'Stay longer, you don’t have to pay, stay longer'"\(^{20}\)

"When I was nine or ten years old I became aware that Akhandananda had his eye on me and was paying me attention..."\(^{21}\)

"I first encountered Swami Akhandananda Saraswati ('Akhandananda') at the Easter yoga camp...after the abuse had started he reminded me of that first encounter. I was quite surprised that he remembered it as he was a very public figure and engaged with a lot of people over the years. He said, “The moment I laid eyes on you I knew one day you would be mine. It was destiny that we had met’."\(^{22}\)

16. They would be made to participate in physically intimate activities with Akhandananda from an young age, often being called on to massage him or to sleep in his bed. Shishy gave evidence that she was aware that these were acts of grooming:

"Q: And you knew that one of the ways that Akhandananda would encourage people towards sexual intercourse was by asking them to massage him? A: Yes"\(^{23}\)

All would later experience abuse in incremental stages over sustained periods of time.

17. Tim Clark confirmed that while he did not know what was happening to the girls, there were certain incidents that stood out in his memory as indicative of such events. He noted that some of the girls “looked stressed out and sad” after their “late night massage sessions in Akhandananda’s back hut”.\(^{24}\) He also stated that APK cried to him that Akhandananda was a “dirty old man”.\(^{25}\)

18. APH notes that she believes, in hindsight, that many of the ashram’s adult female disciplines were aware of the abuse. She believes they did not take

\(^{20}\)Ex 21-0004, 'Statement of Jyoti' STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [8]

\(^{21}\)Ex 21-0008, 'Statement of APH' STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [23]

\(^{22}\)Ex 21-0005, 'Statement of APL' STAT.0426.001.0001_R at [8]-[9]

\(^{23}\)T11238.9-12

\(^{24}\)Ex 21-0013, 'Statement of Tim Clark' STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [23]

\(^{25}\)Ex 21-0013, 'Statement of Tim Clark' STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [20]
any action as they believed it was a “spiritual privilege” to have a sexual relationship with Akhandananda.\textsuperscript{26}

19. Akhandananda regularly visited other ashrams around the country, and would take one or two of the girls with him on these trips. These trips became known to the girls as guaranteed opportunities for sex abuse and were known as occasions to dread and avoid.

*Shishy’s complicity*

20. Jyoti, APK, APL, APA and APH gave evidence of being individually groomed and eventually sexually abused by Akhandananda. The former residents of the ashram gave evidence of Shishy being present during several instances of abuse, which was confirmed by Shishy in her evidence.

21. Shishy was often present in the room where girls were being abused by Akhandananda. APA states:

“On other occasions while Akhandananda was in the act of having sex with me Shishy would enter the room for something and once or twice I heard her in the other bed in the same room...”\textsuperscript{27}

APL’s experience runs parallel:

“At first Shishy would be in the same room but in her own separate bed...”\textsuperscript{28}

Shishy confirmed this in her evidence:

“Q. Around 1982, you became aware that Swami Akhandananda was sexually abusing two of the girls, Alecia and APL; is that right?
A: That’s right.
Q: How did you become aware of that?
A: With both of them, on separate occasions he brought them into his room where I was in another bed and had sex with them.”\textsuperscript{29}

22. Shishy was involved in facilitating abuse by Akhandananda by creating circumstances in which they could be abused, such as organising for female children to go on trips with Akhandananda. In her evidence, Shishy agreed that between 1982 and 1985, several of these trips took place. She also gave evidence that she was privy to Akhandananda’s tendency towards sexual violence during this period:

\textsuperscript{26} Ex 21-0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [25]
\textsuperscript{27} Ex 21-0007, ‘Statement of APA’ STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [49]
\textsuperscript{28} Ex 21-0005, ‘Statement of APL’ STAT.0426.001.0001_R at [39]
\textsuperscript{29} T11194.23-31
"Q: Do you agree with the proposition that between 1982 and 1985, you facilitated child sexual abuse at the hands of Akhandananda?
A: Of course retrospectively, but at the time I really didn’t see it that way, sir. I hope I’ve managed to convey that.
Q: You didn’t see it that way, but that’s certainly what you did – you facilitated child sexual abuse in those years, didn’t you?
A: Yes, I did.\textsuperscript{30}

23. Under Shishy’s care, children were also placed in other inappropriate settings that left them traumatised and vulnerable to potential sex abuse. Children showered communally with adults, and were given “mungen”, an addictive illegal hallucinogenic by adult ashram residents.\textsuperscript{31} Tim Clark stated that they were also made to engage with adults who behaved sexually inappropriately.\textsuperscript{32}

\textit{Shishy’s perpetration}

24. The victims have given evidence that Shishy at times behaved inappropriately around the children. Tim Clark’s statement outlines Shishy’s sexualised behaviour towards him:

“...Shishy would act in a more sexual way doing things like flashing her vagina at me when she was sitting down...it was my impression that I was to try to not have sex with the girls and let her know when I felt like having sex.”\textsuperscript{33}

25. APK gave evidence that Shishy invited some of the younger children into her room when Akhandananda was away and gave them love bites:

“...Shishy would practice love bites on us, teaching us how to give and receive them. It was a bit strange and I wasn’t really that interested in it, but I didn’t question it.”\textsuperscript{34}

26. APK also recounted an incident where she was made to expose herself in front of a group of children and adults at lunchtime:

“She made me spread my legs and expose myself to everyone present. It was humiliating and I initially tried to resist, but by not complying I risked a beating and still would have been forced to expose myself”.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{30} T11238.43-11239.6
\textsuperscript{31} Ex 21-0007, ‘Statement of APA’ STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [23]
\textsuperscript{32} Ex 21-0013, ‘Statement of Tim Clark’ STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [22]
\textsuperscript{33} Ex 21-0013, ‘Statement of Tim Clark’ STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [17]
\textsuperscript{34} Ex-21-0006, ‘Statement of APK’ STAT.0429.001.0001_R at [27]
\textsuperscript{35} Ex-21-0006, ‘Statement of APK’ STAT.0429.001.0001_R at [34]
27. Two of the former female residents accounted that Shishy insisted on inserting tampons for them herself. Shishy agreed that this was an "incredibly intimate relationship" to have with the children.36

28. Many have given evidence regarding Shishy's relationship with APQ. Shishy in her evidence claims that Akhandananda forced her into pursuing a sexual relationship with APQ when he was 14 or 15:

"Oh, he told me that I should start initiating him the same way he did the girls, and he became extremely violent – I refused."37

29. The accounts of the others differ. APK states:

"Shishy was particularly attentive to APQ and it was obvious that she favoured him over all the other children. I think that APQ was 10 or 11 years old at the time".38

30. APL also states:

"Another favourite of hers was a boy called APQ. He got special treatment from Shishy, I think from when he was around 10 or 11 years old. He would follow her everywhere and hand off her. She would sing him love songs and stroke his face...APQ always had things that we didn't have...Shishy indulged his hobbies".39

Life at the ashram – further instances of abuse

31. All former residents have also given evidence as to their otherwise harsh treatment under the guardianship of Shishy at the ashram. The Commission heard that children were expected to make sadhana, which involved completing large amounts of grueling labour as a duty to their guru from early in the morning to late at night. They were not provided with adequate food, clothing or heating during their time at the ashram, while Shishy and Akhandananda received special luxuries.

32. Both Shishy and Akhandananda were known to be violent and volatile people. APK and Jyoti have given evidence relating to Shishy's particularly brutal beating of APA, where she slapped her head repeatedly against a brick wall:

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36 T11202.47-11203.1
37 T11205.16-18
38 Ex-21-0006, 'Statement of APK' STAT.0429.001.0001_R at [28]
39 Ex 21-0005, 'Statement of APL' STAT.0426.001.0001_R at [21]
“One of these beatings occurred when I was standing next to a brick wall. Shishy kept hitting me in the head, and my head kept hitting the wall. Each time it would come back, she would hit me again.”

33. In her evidence Shishy admits that she hit APA and the other children too hard:

“Q: You recognised that you had gone too far?  
A: Yes  
Q: You recognised that you had hit APA too hard?  
A: Yes  
Q: Were there any other occasions when you recall that you hit children too hard?  
A: I think any hit that I gave them was too hard. I regret all of them. I think any hit that I ever gave a child at that time was too hard.”

Response to the abuse

34. In her evidence, Shishy claims to have become aware of the abuse while still living at the ashram. She gave evidence that she did not become aware of the wrongfulness of the abuse until leaving the ashram in 1985.

35. On leaving the ashram in 1985, Shishy flew to India, allegedly to report the abuse to the ashram's headquarters in India. Shishy claimed that she “didn’t really understand anything much outside of the ashram system...had some kind of false, ridiculous, ignorant hope that from the top down in the institution, something would happen to fix it.”

36. Shishy’s claims to have been under “an incredible naivety and ignorance at that time.” She claims to have had little understanding of the outside world, despite having had a self-confessed “fairly ordinary childhood” outside the ashram. Her choice to deal with the ashram headquarters is also questionable considering her alleged sexual exploitation by the founder of the ashram, Satyananda, had been sexually exploited and abused by the founder of the ashram, Satyananda.

37. Despite her knowledge of the abuse, Shishy left the ashram in 1985. She returned for a visit in 1987, when she spoke to a few of the girls about the abuse. Her absence left many of the children who had formed an attachment to her “gobsmacked and some children were distraught”. During her
absence, she left the children in the care of Akhandananda, leaving “a letter for the children telling us to stay and serve Akhandananda and to do whatever he asked of us” 47:

“Q: More than six months you left these children in the hands of a man you knew to be a paedophile; that’s true, isn’t it?  
A: In the terms that we’re sitting in here talking about it today, yes, that’s true.” 48

38. The abuse was also disclosed to psychiatrist Sandra Smith by a number of the girls over a period of time. Initially, Dr Smith did not report the disclosure of the abuse to Police, and only did so later. 49

Submissions

39. Shishy’s statement and evidence given during cross-examination is highly inconsistent with the evidence given by the victims. It is apparent that Shishy held a large degree of decision-making power within the ashram and often acted of her own volition in facilitating the abuse of children at the hands of Akhandananda. She was familiar with and regularly engaged with the outside world and consequently, should have known to report the incidents to the police.

40. Shishy also perpetrated abuse herself. She did not provide adequate food or clothing for the children for whom, of her own admission, she was legally and otherwise responsible. She actively discouraged them from maintaining relationships with their families and encouraged them to put her faith in her, which left them feeling isolated and betrayed when they were abused, leading to significant trauma. There are several accounts of her physical and sexual abuse, humiliation and inappropriate treatment of children, and there is evidence to suggest that she pursued APQ independently and as a grown adult. Due to her closeness and intimacy with the children, and by her own admission, her being a figure they “worshipped”, her failure to provide adequate protection for the children and in perpetrating the abuse herself caused a great deal of trauma and suffering for them.

41. Shishy also appears to have overstated the extent of her relationships with the victims after they left the ashram, and the steps that she took to ameliorate their suffering.

It is submitted that it is open to find that Shishy ought to be referred to the DPP for prosecution.

47 T10995.43-46  
48 T11235.4-8  
49 Ex 21-0004, ‘Statement of Jyoti’ STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [56]-[57]
42. Compensation should be awarded for all those who have suffered. They have suffered, to various degrees and without particularisation, child sexual abuse by a person in a position of trust, prolonged physical abuse, unpaid physical labour, related long standing psychological and psychiatric disorders, loss of education opportunities, related past and future economic loss and on going need for counseling and therapy.

43. In relation to compensation, APK states: “If I’m honest, what I really want to see is the Ashram shut down, but I know that is just a fantasy. I think paying compensation would be the only meaningful way the Ashram could show it acknowledges the significance and impact of the past.

I was effectively kicked out of my home of seven years and left to fend for myself in a world I was not equipped for. My parents gave everything they had; they sold everything we had and gave it to the Ashram. They also gave years of their life to the Ashram and their contributions made a lot of money for the organisation. The Ashram took everything from us but when we left, we left with nothing. I have nothing to leave my children and, because the Ashram set my family back so far financially and personally, I won’t be able to help my children get ahead financially”.

44. Tim Clark states: “Compensation and redress in my view is not an easy matter, as what this organization took from people is something that I cannot put a value on. They took my childhood, they brainwashed me with strange values that did not fit with society, they took away opportunity by enslaving me instead of educating me like every other kid. They wrecked families and lives. I feel that some form of monetary compensation would be appropriate in this case even though it will never give back what was taken from us as children. I also feel that the Ashram and its whole culture that continues to put forward a public view as a “spiritual organisation” should cease to be considered a charity and disbanded. The Ashram culture provided an environment where abuse could occur without scrutiny and whilst the Ashram exists in the current form there is still a high risk that further offences could occur due to the secretive nature of the culture and its dogma of unquestioning obedience.

45. APA states: “I heard through my father that Akhandananda died from alcohol abuse many years ago but I would like to see the Ashram and Shishy held accountable for the abuse and suffering they have caused to so many people. I would like the Ashram to be sold up and be turned into a women’s refuge or a camp for kids in need. I would like to see the whole yoga organisation exposed for the scam I believe it is. I look at pictures of the buildings now and it’s so hard. There’s so much emotion attached to it. We worked like slaves building the Ashram. We were deprived of basic needs like nutritious food and sleep. Now when I look at the Ashram website I feel disgusted. I see

50 Ex-21-0006, ‘Statement of APK’ STAT.0429.001.0001_R at [68]
51 Ex 21-0013, ‘Statement of Tim Clark’ STAT.0433.001.0001_R at [65]
pictures of people lazing about, and eating nice food. It was nothing like that when I was there.

I would like the swamis who are still at the Ashram, and who were there when the abuse was occurring, to acknowledge that the abuse occurred.

I would really like to see Shisly held accountable. It would be one of the biggest insults if she goes to the Royal Commission as a victim and makes any sort of personal claim for money herself. It would be a total insult.

I would like compensation to help me feel a little more secure in this world. I intend to get more counseling as soon as I can. And I hope one day to have a career and provide a better life for my children.”

46. Jyoti states: “I think the Ashram should pay compensation to the victims of abuse along with a personal and very real and heartfelt apology that shows they have fully heard and condemn the abuse that occurred to me. Compensation would greatly assist me. I don’t own the house I live in and have always struggled financially which is in large part because of the damage inflicted upon me as a result of the abuse. Compensation would be a solid and genuine show of respect and acknowledgement of the rights of victims and would be a tiny step towards trying to ease the very real and deep wounds that have profoundly affected my life. It would show that Satyananda Yoga as an organisation is willing to suffer a little in order to make this right. After all, the whole organisation is built entirely on the swear and tears of our very hard and free labour given in trust and faith to an organisation we had believed in.”

47. APL states: “I want the Ashram to be made accountable and transparent. It appears they would rather protect the Ashram brand than confront the abuse of the children in their care. The fact that the Ashram decided to block people from posting the truth on their Facebook page suggests the Ashram wants to hide its past from the public and that makes them dangerous to children who currently visit and reside there. I would like Shisly to finally be made accountable for her role in the abuse. I don’t expect she will ever tell the truth and truly apologise or make amends, especially not to me. I would like to see her prosecuted for child abuse. I would like her to do community service for the rest of her life without any recognition.

I would like the Ashram and Shisly to financially compensate me for the ruin that my life is. I would like to see my sister APK compensated for the abuses she suffered in the ashram’s care. I want my parents to be financially compensated for the 10 years of hard work they did at the Ashram for no financial reward.”

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52 Ex 21-0007, 'Statement of APA' STAT.0423.001.0001_R at [67]-[70]
53 Ex 21-0004, 'Statement of Jyoti' STAT.0420.001.0001_R at [68]
54 Ex 21-0005, 'Statement of APL' STAT.0426.001.0001_R at [93]-[94]
48. APH states: “As an outcome of this Royal Commission, I would like to see more transparency, and rules and checks on spiritual organisations. People who are attracted to that sort of spiritual life, spiritual seekers, are vulnerable to begin with. Those who allowed abuse to occur must be held to account. Those pretending the past is in the past must face their past in this present. Those hiding behind the guise of spirituality must realise they are not above the law”.

49. The ashram’s attempt to ameliorate the suffering of the abuse victims was too little too late and was done in an insensitive manner. The members of the taskforce included those who had been actively supporting Akhandananda during his court proceedings in the 1980s.

Q. So again I ask you in retrospect, putting [Haribodh] on the taskforce, particularly if you didn’t have a good idea of what went down and how it all happened, was a very poor judgment call?
A. I accept that it could have - yeah, it was a poor decision.

Q. You’d understand that when people who were abused by Akhandananda came to learn that he was part of the taskforce, you could understand that they would be –
A. Now I do, yes.

50. They employed a man called Bert Franzen to deal with people who had endured years of hardship flowing from the abuse at the hands of Akhandananda, perfectly aware that Franzen had absolutely no qualifications or training in dealing with childhood victims of sexual assault. This would suggest they were more concerned for the ashram brand than for the victims of abuse.

51. Their attempt at the fire ceremony as a method of healing bordered on the absurd:

Q. Can I ask you this: What is a havan, H-A-V-A-N?
A. Havan, it’s a fire ceremony.
Q. What does it involve, what does a fire ceremony involve?
A. Usually it’s combined with the chanting of certain mantras, and you have a number of people sitting around the fire making - offering substances into the fire as the mantras are chanted. It’s a very thousands of years old Vedic ceremony.

55 Ex 21.0008, ‘Statement of APH’ STAT.0402.001.0001_R at [55]
56 T11533.32-42
57 T11543
Q. Would you be surprised then if you learnt that my clients, all of whom were in the ashram in the 1980s for several years, had never engaged in a havan fire ceremony?
A. No, I wouldn't be surprised, because I don't think they were performed back then; it's something that's been introduced into the ashrams more recently.

Q. Did you hear [APL] read an email that had been sent to the organisation about this particular fire ceremony?
A. Could you remind me of the email?

Q. It was pretty blunt, it referred to a fire ceremony in language that suggests it was a complete waste of time for victims. Do you remember that?
A. Okay. Yes, I remember something about that, yes.

Q. The question naturally has to be, how on earth was a fire ceremony or a havan ever going to be of any assistance to these victims of abuse?
A. The fire ceremony was part of many actions or things that we tried to do this year, and everything that we did or decisions we made, we were trying to do something that would be helpful and we realised that we didn't succeed in that, which is one of the reasons why we're so welcoming of this Royal Commission, because obviously we haven't done the right thing, so what is the right thing? We're hoping that this process will help us determine what that is. But specifically in answer about havans, we use havans as - in one way we use them is actually for healing. So we do that every week anyway in the ashrams. You can consider it a - you know, like, in the Christian religion, people pray for each other or pray for others to help them in life's difficulties or for healing or whatever; maybe you could consider it as equivalent to that. It's quite symbolic as well

Q. Can you appreciate the position of a victim of child abuse, who'd never before heard of a havan or participated in one, that they might think that having such a ritual is just meaningless?
A. Yes.

Q. That people chanting around a fire was never ever going to go anywhere near a healing process for them?
A. Yes, I can appreciate that.

Q. And that they would be extremely skeptical of an organisation whose response is to have a fire ceremony to somehow deal with the trauma that they've experienced?
A. Yes, but I think it's important to remember that the fire ceremony was one part of what we were doing.58

58 T11545.47-11547.15
52. The ashram has made no financial recompense to any of the survivors of the abuse by their one-time spiritual leader Akhandananda. A fair summary of the way in which they dealt with the survivors is that they did very little more than pay lip service to the suffering and were more intent on preserving the organisation’s image.

53. **We reserve our right to make oral submissions along with these written submissions.**

Peter O’Brien
10 March 2015

[Signature]