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Title fraud at Zen.nl, authorizations have no formal value

Rients Ritskes, the leader of Zen.nl, has been educating people to become Zen Teachers or Zen Masters for years, without having any authorization himself. Any authorizations of Zen.nl are by consequence formally without value.

Ritskes made false claims about his status on his website and in interviews and talks. He claimed that he was authorized as a Zen Master in 1999 by Sokun Tsushimoto Roshi, a Japanese zen master who is now a practicing physician. Ritskes calls himself 'Zen Master', 'Dai Osho' and 'Roshi'. He cashes large amounts of money for his education activities. In early april, after being urged by Sokun Tsushimoto Roshi, he deleted his false claim from his website. It is however still to be found in many other places on the web. Tsushimoto Roshi has also insisted on a public declaration in which Ritskes tell the truth. So far, this has not happened. The code of conduct of Zen.nl states as #10: 'You see through your own shortcomings and can easily make apologies where necessary.'

(<http://www.zen.nl/nl/gedragscode.php> - text has been adapted since: 'easily make apologies' changed into 'try to learn continuously').

Sokun Tsushimoto Roshi didn't know about Ritskes' claim until early April of this year. On his website www.revsokun.net Tsushimoto now writes: 'I declare that I have never ever authorized anyone as a Roshi (zen master).' He says he is 'very sad and furious' about being used by Rients Ritskes like this. He gave Ritskes a rakusu in 1999 as a sign of friendship. The rakusu is a Japanese symbol of the robe of the Buddha. Tsushimoto writes about this: 'When zen master authorizes his disciple as his Dharma successor, he officially gives his disciple 'Inka-certificate (calligraphy)' as an evidence of authorization. Then a title of Roshi is conferred upon the disciple. Other form of authorization, for example presenting Rakusu, surplice robe and etc, is not allowed.'

For his education activities, Ritskes asks 297,50 euros per month (people with little money can ask for a discount). People can reach a 'first-, second- or third grade proficiency' within a certain amount of time, if they meet certain qualifications and efforts. At this time, 135 people follow the program at any stage. Another 100 have done so before. The gross income from only this Zen.nl activity is probably several hundred thousands of euros per year.

Tsushimoto Roshi about the terms and the money involved: 'One cannot buy zen. It is total nonsense to say that one can become a zenteacher or Zen Master within a certain time frame, even if one has to meet certain requirements. Zen is individual practice in which you search for true self which is no-self. A true Zen Master or teacher doesn't ask large amounts of money for courses and zen training.'

After Tsushimoto wrote Ritskes about his false statement, Ritskes suddenly writes him something else about his authorization. He now declares that 'his 30 teachers' decided to authorize him as a Zen Master / Roshi in 2010. According to Ritskes, to this aim they signed a certificate and gave him a new rakusu. In the Zen tradition it is not possible for students to authorize their teacher. Possibly because of that, he tells Tsushimoto at the same time that he has 'already broadly announced' in the Netherlands that from now on, which is 3 years later, he will continue without any ties to Japanese Rinzaï zen, and that Tsushimoto hasn't given any authorization to Ritskes.

Under the pressure of circumstances, Ritskes by now has issued a press release himself in which he pretends to 'break' with his Japanese master (that he doesn't have) out of free will, and that he has left for Japan to bring back 'his monks robe'. By the way, Tsushimoto Roshi now lives in London. Also, in his press release Ritskes presents the information about his so-called authorization in a false way again.