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SHAMBHALA

# Report Reveals New Sexual Assault Allegations Against Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

New accusers come forward to allege misconduct by the Shambhala leader, who stepped aside from teaching duties last month, in a third report by Buddhist Project Sunshine.

By Wendy Joan Biddlecombe Agsar

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**Buddhist Project Sunshine, an advocacy group that has exposed allegations** of sexual misconduct at Shambhala International, has issued a new report with accusations of abuse from three more former members.

The main accuser, referred to by the pseudonym “Ann” in the report, declined to speak with *Tricycle* about her accusations. Lawyers for Shambhala, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, and the governing body known as the Kalapa Council did not return emails seeking comment. [Shortly after this article was published, Shambhala International issued a forceful rebuttal of the allegations. See update below.]

Previous reports released by Buddhist Project Sunshine (BPS) in [June](#) and [February](#), respectively, have launched Shambhala’s #MeToo movement, and forced Shambhala to respond to what they called “[abhorrent sexual behavior](#)” in the organization—both from the Sakyong and other leaders—as more and more anonymous claims were published.

The Shambhala leader stepped down from his teaching and administrative roles last month after accusations that he [locked a woman in a bathroom in Chile](#) surfaced. Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has also resigned from his trustee seat at Naropa University and as Naropa’s lineage holder pending the outcome. In July, all nine members of Shambhala’s governing Kalapa Council have announced that they will step aside because they “need to dissolve to make order for real change.”

Wickwire Holm, a Halifax, Nova Scotia-based law firm, is looking into the claims, and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has said that he “fully supports” the investigation, which is also addressing institutional coverup.

Buddhist Project Sunshine was started by Andrea Winn, a leadership coach and second-generation Shambhalian who says she was forced out of her Toronto sangha in 2000 after disclosing that she had been abused in the organization as a child.

### Earlier coverage:

### [\*\*• Shambhala Head Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche Accused of Sexual Abuse in New Report\*\*](#)

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In the report released today, Carol Merchasin, a retired employment lawyer who offered her expertise to BPS to investigate the claims and who completed several levels of Shambhala training in the 1980s, recounts Ann’s experiences.

“Ann’s story (even though written by me contains details that have not yet been corroborated, largely as you will see, because the only people who could confirm her story are people who have refused to speak about it,” Merchasin writes.

Ann started exploring Buddhist teachings in 2001 at her local Shambhala center (the location was not provided) to heal from her painful experience as a child prostitute who was pimped out by her own father who ran a daycare. Ann first encountered the Sakyong at a retreat—where she opened up about being abused as a child—and was later brought to the Shambhala leader to give him a traditional “healing service.”

The sexual advances started in 2002 or 2003, according to Ann, and although she rebuffed his first attempts, she started having sex with him because she feared his being angry and cold with her, she alleges, and because the Sakyong told her that sleeping with your teacher is a part of guru yoga practice.

Ann also alleges that a male senior teacher told her the Sakyong seeks out “trauma survivors” and “vulnerable women.” Ann told Merchasin that she “specifically asked” female Acharyas or other senior female teachers “whether the statement in one of the restricted Sadhana [spiritual exercise] practices that reads ‘whatever the guru commands I will follow’ meant that she had to have sex with him ‘on demand’ in the middle of the night, give money that she didn’t have, and be controlled by him.” They allegedly responded that these situations were “not a big deal” and it was “an honor” to serve Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

Ann alleges that the Saykong forced her to perform a sexual act on him in front of other members of his “inner circle” and asked her to engage in a sexual act with the other men present.

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because of her samaya vows, and threatening her that if she spoke up about any of her experiences, she would “live in the hell realms.” She is not a current Shambhala member.

Ann has indicated her interest in sharing her accounts with the District Attorney in Larimer County, Colorado. Merchasin said she has not alerted prosecutors. Merchasin has also asked the investigating law firm to appoint an independent monitor “to give everyone a measure of confidence” that the probe is neutral.

The report claims that the Sakyong’s sexual misconduct started back in 1987, the same year that his father and Shambhala founder Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, died. And, unlike earlier reports that accused Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche of having sex with women after boozy private parties, this report alleges he was not always inebriated when he pursued and/or allegedly assaulted women.

The report also contains the account of a man called “Keith” who was allegedly raped at age 15 by an older male sangha member in 1983 at the Karme Choling retreat center in Vermont and “Laura,” who was sexually assaulted at age 18 by an older male at a Shambhala property called The Encampment in 1998. Shambhala did not report these assaults to the police, according to the report, but instead offered both Keith and Laura opportunities to meet with their alleged attackers for mediation.

Andrea Winn of Buddhist Project Sunshine told *Tricycle* that she hopes this report “will bring things to a clear enough point.”

“Hopefully the community will have enough information to make a decision about not going forward with Mipham Rinpoche as the head of the community,” Winn said.

She added that, moving forward, Buddhist Project Sunshine will focus more on “exploring alternative governance structure and envisioning what Shambhala can become.”

Buddhist Project Sunshine has received \$16,564 in donations since April, and Buddhist

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based on speculative and unsubstantiated claims made by a single unnamed source. For Project Sunshine to publish such salacious and defamatory information is grossly irresponsible.”

A Shambhala representative also forwarded a statement from acharya [teacher] Noel McLellan denying accusations in the BPS report. McLellan said he “spent most of every day” at Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche’s residence during the summers of 2004 and 2005 when he was “a leader within the Sakyong’s household staff.” He claims, “I am not aware of any encounters such as are described as happening at that time at the SMC household, and can say with reasonable confidence that they did not take place.”

**Update (08/24):** Michael Scott, a lawyer for Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, responded to the Phase 3 report in an email to *Tricycle*, saying, “We are greatly disappointed that Ms. Winn has chosen to include the abuse of children to her list of accusations. As fits the pattern to date, the allegations are vague, unsourced and uncorroborated. If Ms. Winn has information about the abuse of a child, any child, by anyone, she should contact law-enforcement authorities immediately.” Scott also noted that the Sakyong’s public apology to “anyone who feels they have been harmed” sent out on June 25 “should not be misinterpreted as a validation of the accusations being advanced by Ms. Winn and her associates. The Sakyong categorically denies that he has ever participated in any activity that could be construed as a “sexual assault”, attempted or otherwise, sexual contact with minors, or any other criminal offence.” Scott declined to comment further “out of respect for the independent investigation.”

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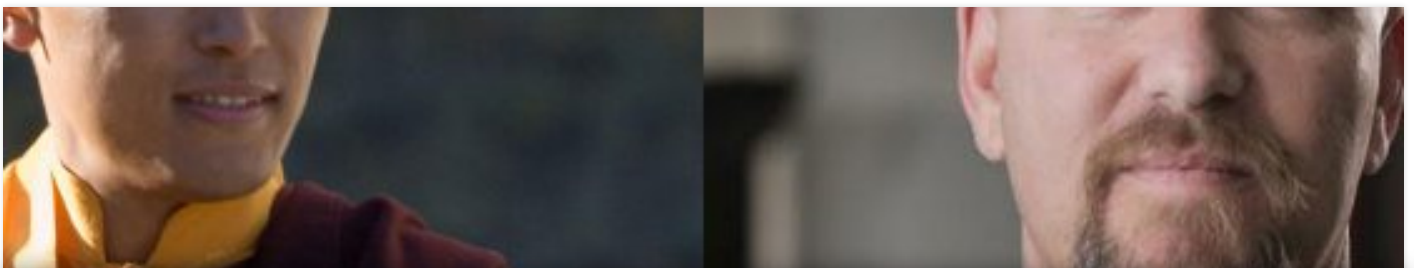


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