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An open letter to readers of the Buddhist Channel

The Buddhist Channel, July 7, 2007

Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia -- The Buddhist Channel have received an email notice by the Chair of the Trustees from Pine Forest for allegations of publishing a "series of defamatory, wholly inaccurate and malicious material" regarding their organization.

As a response to the situation, its founder and publisher, Lim Kooi Fong has issued a reply to the organization concerned, as explained in the letter below:

An open letter to readers of the Buddhist Channel

The Buddhist Channel have received an email notice by the Chair of the Trustees from Pine Forest for allegations of publishing a "series of defamatory, wholly inaccurate and malicious material" regarding their organization.

Pine Forest is the purported Buddhist retreat center located in Snowdonia National Park, north Wales, headed by Edward Penney. Edward claims that he is a "monk", who also calls himself "Edo Shonin", "Edo Yamato" and "Jetsun Lama Br. Edo Yamato Shonin".

The allegations concerned letters and articles published in the Buddhist Channel between May 25, 2007 and June 22, 2007.

The channel reiterates that it had made careful and thorough investigations before our lead article "The different shades of 'Edo Shonin'" was published. Amongst them were five email contacts made between June 14 and 18 by our associate working on this case, Ven. Kobutsu Malone, Osho whose correspondences were responded by one William John Van Gordon of Pine Forest (see Exhibit 2 below).

We have also exercised great caution in procuring primary materials to aid in our investigation before producing the said article (refer to Exhibit 2 again).

As a responsible media, we have requested the Chair of the Trustees of Pine Forest to use our "Write to the Editor" facility to refute and rebut the alleged claims made by various readers. If they had done so, we would have obliged to publish it in public domain. However, due to reasons unknown to us, Pine Forest has decided to issue a legal notice rather than use a freely available open forum.

For the sake of keeping to the precepts, especially of upholding Right Speech, and to uphold the spirit of free inquiry as taught in the "Kalama Sutta", the two email exchanges between Pine Forest and the Buddhist Channel will now be displayed in public domain.

The reason for this is simple. We understand that some other Buddhist groups have also received similar notices. Due to the group's action, a prominent online forum has pulled out discussion threads which have also touched on the issue.

We believe, by no means that Buddhists who uphold the purity of the Buddha Dharma and

who have done the utmost to keep to the precepts and maintaining Right Speech, should give way to threats issued by anyone.

As our valued readers, we humbly seek your wisdom and compassion to understand the decision I - as founder and publisher of the channel - am taking to resolve this matter as peacefully as possible.

We would like to request you to join in our effort to radiate thoughts of loving kindness to all concerned (especially to Pine Forest) so that good sense shall prevail.

Thank you and may you – precious Dharma protectors – be well and happy always.

With loving kindness

Lim Kooi Fong
Managing Publisher
www.BuddhistChannel.tv
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Exhibit 1
Email from William John Van Gordon, June 27, 2007

Dear Lim Kooi Fong
(Managing Editor – The Buddhist Channel – www.buddhistchannel.tv),

I am writing on behalf of Pine Forest Sangha (registered charity no. 1114170) further to a series of defamatory, wholly inaccurate and malicious material that is published on your website regarding this organisation, some of its members and its resident monks.

The slanderous letters and articles that you have published are having a significant, tangible and provable impact upon this charity's fundraising revenues. Examples of such materials include an article written by yourself in the 'Issues' section of your 'News' page entitled "The Changing Shades of Edo Shonin", and various letters written in the 'Letters' section of your website.

Firstly, you have not at any time contacted us directly for comment regarding the material you have published and secondly you have relied only on third party sources which provide only fabricated or unsubstantiated allegations. In addition to citing other sources you also make your own slanderous statements which are totally unsubstantiated and false.

I am therefore writing to you on a formal basis to inform you that unless you respond to this email and remove any such material from your website within the next 3 days and control and moderate the website on an on-going basis in accordance with your requirements under media law we shall without further correspondence instruct our solicitors to take proceedings against you.

Further, I would like to inform you that a small number of individuals have been arrested for assault, charged and given bail conditions by the police for harassment in relation to fabricating and propagating malicious rumours about us and that this charity is currently pursuing legal proceedings against these individuals and a national UK newspaper for defamation and slander.

We look forward to receiving your response in due course and request that a full postal address and contact name is provided along with your return email.

Yours Sincerely

William John Van Gordon
Chair of the Trustees

Note: This letter was copied to Trefor Jones, Aaron and partners solicitors

Exhibit 2

The Buddhist Channel's response to William John Van Gordon on June 30, 2007

Dear Mr William John Van Gordon,

I refer to your email entitled "Defamation and Slander".

As the only Buddhist Electronic Newspaper in the world, we welcome readers to submit their views for publication. Likewise, we hope that you will also use the facilities made available at the site www.BuddhistChannel.tv to rebut and refute the claims by our readers which you alleged to have slandered and defamed your organization.

Should you decide against exercising this option, in the spirit of "free and open inquiry" as taught by the Buddha in the Kalama Sutta, and decides to take legal recourse against us for doing so, we will be obliged take up your challenge and refer to the judiciary process to obtain certain information which we believe is of paramount interest to the Buddhist faith.

Please note that our associate Ven. Kobutsu Malone, Osho have written via email to you five times from June 14 to June 18 requesting an answer to this question:

Will you be kind enough to inform me when, where, in what tradition, and under who's auspices Edward Penney was ordained as a Buddhist monk?

To date, neither yourself nor any representative from your organization have given clear, concise answers to that simple query.

To aid our own investigations, we have obtained more information from materials published and distributed by your very own organization. I refer to the Pine Forest brochure and your website www.pineforest.org.uk, which I assure you are readily available in public.

Believe me, we do not need to resort to any 3rd party hearsays to get these materials.

All said, we have a copy of the Pine Forest brochure which clearly states (under the section of "About the Resident Teacher") that "Edo Shonin has been a monk in the Nygma and Shingon tradition for 43 years...".

We also have a screenshot of your website captured on May 26, 2007 which your organization referred to the various Buddhist lineages:

"In Brief, the lineages taught here are twofold: the older form of Mikkyo which traces it's lineage to Tathagata Mahavairocana (influenced mainly from the Paekche kingdom in Korea and China) and the older form stream of the oral transmission school of Nyingma (sem-dé) in which Atiyoga (Dzogchen) and Lam rim has the main influence. This lineage traces back to Aro Yeshé Jungné . These two schools of Buddhist thought are essentially the same; the only difference being that one has origin in Tibet and the other in Japan. So, two languages and two cultures (Tibet and Japan) but the same path."

(Screenshot attached)

This would explain the "odd" costume worn by Edo Shonin, which as far as we know does not exist as a Sangha uniform either in the mainstream Buddhist schools of Theravada, Mahayana or Vajrayana tradition. The image in this costume can be easily seen on your website right now (dated June 29, 2007, screenshot attached). Interestingly, your "updated" website has deleted all references with regards to the description of lineages.

It is these inconsistencies that we are concerned about.

As the media voice of the Buddhist world, our paramount concern is the integrity of the Buddha Dharma. The inconsistencies displayed in the publicity of your activities, more so in the awkward description of your "teacher" and his background, casts much doubt about his credibility as a "monk". We are also concerned that your organization are using such inconsistent materials to back up your charity drive, which if goes unquestioned will

certainly tarnish the integrity and purity of the Buddha Dharma.

And so we wish to invite you again to please use our facilities to rebut and refute the so called allegations which have purportedly slandered and defamed your organization or charity.

Should you wish to proceed to take legal actions against us, please be reminded that we have the relevant legal and vinaya (monk's discipline) experts from the three major traditions - Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana - at our disposal. We will be more than happy to attend court, if this is the only way to bring out into the open the true meaning and nature of Edo Shonin's credibility as a monk.

Please forward this contact information to your attorney:

The Buddhist Channel
www.BuddhistChannel.tv
Attention: Mr Lim Kooi Fong
No 45B, Jalan SS24/8
47301 Petaling Jaya
Selangor DE, Malaysia

We will do so likewise with our attorney.

Thank you
Lim Kooi Fong

This article comes from **The Buddhist Channel** site
(<http://www.buddhistchannel.tv>).

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