

An Open Letter to the Santo Daime Community

For many, this letter and information concerning Paulo Roberto Souza de Silva, the leader of the Rio de Janeiro Santo Daime church of Céu do Mar, will come as no surprise.

Mr Souza de Silva is being sued by a woman who was a member of the Rio de Janeiro church community, she was also employed by him in his non-profit. Her accusations include him manipulating her into a sexual relationship, and drugging and raping her within that relationship. In addition, she is accusing his wife, Nonata de Melo e Souza, the youngest daughter of the Mapia family of Padrinho Sebastian Mota de Melo (deceased) and his wife, the Matriarch of the Mapia Santo Daime line, Madrinha Rita Gregorio de Melo, of colluding in the abuse.

We fully support the actions of this woman, and applaud her courage. We hope she knows that many people are supporting her and we hope that she will not allow the pressure or manipulations of others to deter her from her efforts for justice.

The principles of the Santo Daime ask us to live with sincerity and respect with one another, and to clear up any misunderstandings that might occur. This spiritual direction recognizes our humanity, and therefore our tendency to make mistakes; it indicates where the moral line of behavior is drawn, and what to do when a mistake is made.

In Canada, there are ethical values common to our culture, and to personal and business practices. When certain lines are crossed, they move beyond a mistake or error of judgement, and can become a civil matter, or a criminal matter, and there are consequences.

Great accomplishments do not put one above the principles of the faith, or the law. The foundation of the Santo Daime is love, harmony, truth and justice. Forgiveness is encouraged by our principles, but does not eliminate accountability or justice. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two separate experiences. Reconciliation requires truth-telling and accountability.

It is not our cultural norm, especially since the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, the Me-Too movement, and the many current criminal actions against Canadian athletes, celebrities and political members, to accept wrong-doing and look the other way, or worse, to participate in cover-ups.

Very troubling is that in all prior incidents regarding Mr Souza de Silva, the focus has been on forgiving the perpetrator and spiritualizing his misconducts, the claim made that he was under the influence of "dark forces". No efforts have been made to attend to the needs of the victims, rather every effort was made to discredit them and to cover up the complaints.

There is a long history of abuse on the part of Mr Silva e Souza. Céu do Montréal closed its connection with Céu do Mar in 2002 as these and other abuses of power became known.

Also problematic is that "guru" status has been afforded the Céu do Mar elders by many people in the international Santo Daime community. In naïve enthusiasm for spiritual enlightenment, it is not uncommon for people to project their higher self onto others, particularly those in positions of authority. Unfortunately, this dynamic, if not addressed by the elders through open dialogue and ethical practice, can lead to considerable harm to both the elders and the community.

Of considerable concern is that part of the defense for the assaults is the belief that dark seductive beings/forces can be within a girl/woman, and that these dark beings/forces are responsible for the actions on the part of the man. This appalling lack of accountability is deeply troubling. If a person in a position of responsibility can not manage their decisions and/or actions, they should be removed from office.

We were then, and remain now, gravely concerned that these matters reflect negatively upon the Santo Daime.

Written for Chacrana, November 5th, 2024.

Rev Dr Jessica Rochester
Founder and Madrinha, Céu do Montreal,
On behalf of the Board of Directors