

## **Letter from Jonathan Goldman - leader in Santo Daime legal church in Ashland, Oregon**

To the Brothers, Sisters, and Dear Ones of CHLQ,

The Santo Daime world is shaking. There have been credible accusations of sexual abuse, coercion, and manipulation against Paulo Roberto Souza de Silva, the leader of the Rio de Janeiro church of Céu do Mar. He is being sued by a woman who was a member of the church community and who also worked for him in his non-profit. She is accusing him of both manipulating her into a sexual relationship, and drugging and raping her within that relationship. In addition, she is accusing his wife, Nonata, of colluding in the abuse. Many other women are now speaking up about the same experiences they have had with him.

This is by far not the first incidence of such behavior on Paulo's part. For decades he has acted as a predator within his own church community, and in the extended circle of those who have considered him their padrinho, their mentor, and their spiritual leader. That circle is primarily in the US, Canada, and Mexico. He has also been supported, and continues to be supported, financially and by long-time excusing and rationalizing of his behavior, by a number of wealthy and prominent US Daimistas.

Basically, the METOO movement is belatedly catching up with the Daime world. Paulo Roberto is not the only male leader or member of a Daime church being outed as a predator. We are collectively in a moment of reckoning that has been a long time in coming. There are people, mostly women, in the Daime world who have long identified both Paulo Roberto and others as committing predatory behavior, only to be castigated and accused of jealousy and disloyalty and of being controlled by negative beings. The women who have been subjected to the predatory behavior have in particular been called Pomba giras, whores, and seductresses by Nonata and others in positions of power in the Daime world. And even now, there is an effort among some prominent men in the Daime world to classify the claims of sexual predation and the support of people backing those claims as the work of radical, man-hating feminists, and women seeking money. These transparent claims, expressed so far by male leaders and supporters of Paulo Roberto, are typically seeking to perpetuate the male-dominated, patriarchal culture that includes license for male leaders to abuse women with impunity. They are also, in typical fashion, using the irrelevant sexual history of the claimants as evidence of seduction and lies.

There is simultaneously a growing movement in the Daime world, led by women on every level of the community and on every branch of the Daime tree, to bring this phenomenon (which is also rampant in the spiritual world in general) into the Light of truth, and to create clear guidelines and commitments to eliminate this behavior and educate the brothers and sisters as to its existence. We are being afforded a chance to clean our circle of lies and distortions and to come some steps closer to the this-world manifestation of the beautiful spiritual teachings of our Doctrine. The brave women who are coming forward, claiming their power and voice, are giving all of us a gift.

We sing hymn after hymn lauding the truth. Now we are dealing with the uncovering of uncomfortable truths that we have collectively colluded in covering up for decades. It is a beautiful, difficult, and powerful moment in our history. How we navigate it will determine much about our future as a viable spiritual path. We claim to hold a safe space for everyone, no matter who they are, what they've been through or done, to come and receive healing and knowledge. That claim cannot be truthful if the space contains sexual predation of any kind, by anyone.

We believe and seek to embody the universal energies of forgiveness, justice, mercy, love, compassion, redemption, and faith. These qualities are not antithetical to the acknowledgement of painful truth and the making of adjustments in our circle to make that truth be clear and held with humility and honor.

Our greatest power comes from our choice for union. Our commitment to our path and to the principles and teachings we have been given, and to the holding of the space of humility, compassion, and faith will afford us the chance for transformation and redemption for all of us. We are people and a community in the process of transformation.

We are at a powerful moment of choice: each of us individually, each church and point collectively, and as a movement. Let's go forward in our union, taking good advantage of the shakeup and opportunity being afforded us by the courage of the women speaking up for truth and justice.

Jonathan Goldman  
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