

'Secret' sex shakes yoga school

January 20, 2015 [Keith Platt](#)

Apology: Swami Shankarananda has apologised for the "disastrous effect" his actions have had on members of the Shiva School of Meditation and Yoga at Mt Eliza. Picture: Gary Sissons

ALLEGATIONS of sexual impropriety have shaken the usual calm surrounding the Shiva School of Meditation and Yoga at Mt Eliza.

American-born ashram director Swami Shankarananda, also known as Swamiji (formerly known as Russell Kruckman), is alleged to have had sexual relations with more than 40 women attending the ashram.

Free confidential counselling is being offered to "anyone who needs assistance" while a sub-committee has been appointed to write a code of conduct for everyone working for the ashram, including Swami Shankarananda.

"It breaks my heart that our beautiful Satsang [gathering for the truth] has been shaken and split by anger and confusion," the 72-year-old swami wrote in a letter seeking forgiveness from ashram members.

The management committee of the residential ashram in Tower Rd said Swami Shankarananda – although never claiming to be "a sexual renunciant" or demanding celibacy from any of his students – had admitted it was inappropriate to keep "aspects of the teaching and his personal activities secret".

The committee has allowed him to remain as the ashram's spiritual director.

Although it had received legal advice to the effect that no criminal laws had been broken, the committee said Swami Shankarananda's "activities ... raise a number of potential ethical issues" and had started an "internal processes to address any grievances ... and the perceived risk of any future misconduct".

"I can say that this is an internal matter and we have not been contacted by the police," said Stephen Stanford, a member of the Shiva Yoga management committee.

Shiva School of Meditation and Yoga was established in 1991 and soon after moved into the residential ashram in Mt Eliza. The ashram has about 500 regular attendees, including 20 who live on-site.

In his letter, Swami Shankarananda apologises "to the community and to anyone who has been hurt by my actions, or even by hearing of my actions".

In an apparent reference to his book *Carrot In My Ear* ("a guidebook to the inner experience, offering insights and techniques to dissolve ignorance and live with energy and awareness"), his letter states: "I had a carrot in my ear. Truly. When contemplating Baba's life, I was most engaged by the dramas of the succession. I profoundly underestimated the impact of his tantric sexual activities. And my own. I recognise at last their disastrous effect. I vow to stop this behaviour. Indeed, it has been stopped already."

Swami Shankarananda said he wanted to make amends "in an atmosphere of love and generosity of spirit, not vilification on either side".

"I know people are disappointed and upset. I apologise to them and ask their forgiveness."

He said there had been a lot of good done at the ashram in the past 20 years and his "tantric activities have been the only blemish".

"As I have said, I have stopped them. When peace returns, perhaps I will speak and write about what is to be learned.

"I am open to a dialogue about the role of the guru and sannyasa in the modern west and also the place of sexuality in spiritual life – and other matters. We are pioneers, after all, and getting it all right isn't easy.

"I don't know how I could have been this stupid ... but I was. I beg your forgiveness."

News of the swami's conduct has been discussed on social media, with one commentator on Guruphiliac's Facebook page labelling the Shiva School's response "outrageous ... we have spoken to some of the women involved and heard their heartbreaking personal accounts in detail, and we see nothing in his actions that could in any way be called tantric or yogic, healing or spiritual".

The page said Swami Shankarananda was involved in advising devotees about many aspects of their lives, including personal relationships, "when to get a new job or leave one, where to live".

"For ashramites, this goes further, with some having to ask permission to even leave the premises for a few hours."

The statement issued by the ashram's management committee said "many people are hurt, angry and confused".

"The committee is taking this situation very seriously and is dedicated to resolving the issue with honesty, transparency and compassion.

“Swamiji has asked us on his behalf to reiterate his message for the year of holding the feeling – that is, stay away from enmity, and keep returning to love.”