

Puget Sound Zen Center Code of Ethics and Grievance and Reconciliation Policies for Members/Participants

Revised January, 2023

The Puget Sound Zen Center (PSZC) strives to create a safe, welcoming and nourishing place for the study and practice of Rinzai Zen Buddhism. The precepts provide a good outline for ethical conduct in daily life and in our Zen community. In our commitment to maintaining an atmosphere of trust and openness, PSZC participants are asked to interact with each other in a manner that reflects respect and flows from the precepts.

The Five Precepts involve:

- 1) Respecting the dignity of living beings and refraining from harm to others.
- 2) Being generous and trustworthy.
- 3) Honoring romantic commitments; cultivating lasting, loving relationships.
- 4) Being truthful and considerate in speech.
- 5) Keeping a clear mind to study the roots of cravings.

Teachers

Because of the high level of responsibility Teachers assume in the teacher-student relationship, a separate Teacher Ethics Policy was created in 2013 and added to the bylaws. A copy of this document is available on our website. All teachers whether appointed, visiting, or training are asked to review and abide by the ethical code outlined in this policy. “Teacher” is defined as: the Abbot, a Teacher at a multiday retreat, and any ordained member of our Sangha who has become a Junior Teacher, or Shuso.

Confidentiality

In a Sangha on a small island, confidentiality can be a problem. PSZC Teachers have pledged to honor and respect all confidences and exchanges shared in the teacher/student relationship unless health or safety is at risk. Similarly, Sangha

members are also asked to refrain from harmful or frivolous speech that involves other participants at the Zen Center. Although this is not a code of secrecy, all members should be able to engage in the community with the knowledge that their privacy will be respected.

Dual Relationships/Professional Conflicts

Dual relationships are another challenge in a small community where members wear several hats and may have professional relationships with each other outside of the Sangha. Many of our members are psychotherapists, teachers, coaches, healthcare providers, or other professionals. It is important that we remain mindful in our exchanges with each other and of the potential abuses that might arise when roles are confused and interpersonal relationships grow in complexity. Licensed professionals are expected to abide by the ethical codes of their professions. Participants in the Sangha are asked to remain aware of situations where a conflict of interest might arise. It is appropriate to bring any questions or concerns about these issues to each other or to the Ethics Committee.

Informal Procedure for Resolving Conflict

When difficulties arise, PSZC is committed to finding wise ways to work with conflict. The health of our Sangha is measured by our ability to accept that tensions do arise and enhanced by our ability to embrace a compassionate means of addressing them. When a conflict or concern arises within the Sangha, ideally it can be resolved through direct conversation between the individuals involved. If this is not possible, the concern should be brought to a member of the Ethics Committee. The Committee will work with the individuals involved to resolve the dispute informally and will make a confidential written record of the interaction.

Recommendations for Resolving Conflicts and Disagreements

Although no fixed procedures for informal conflict resolution exists, the suggestions that follow are intended to give all persons involved a chance to be fully heard in an environment of respect and kindness.

1. Stating the Actual

A crucial aspect of conflict resolution, just as in Buddhist practice itself, is discriminating between our interpretations and opinions of an event and how the event was or is personally experienced. In part, this means not making general statements but rather sticking to the particulars of actual situations and the emotions experienced. It is extremely difficult to have mutual understanding when discussion remains at the level of interpretation and generalization.

2. Being Heard

It is important that everyone have an opportunity to be fully heard. This means that each person has a chance to recount how they remember the history of a conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Much conflict arises and is perpetuated through a lack of mutual understanding; taking calm, deliberate, and adequate time to listen to each other is the first step toward reconciliation.

3. Restating What Was Heard

To ensure that individuals understand one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said, highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate, and makes corrections.

4. Self-Reflection and Apology

Resolution and reconciliation are greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how they may have contributed to a conflict. Even when one person is primarily responsible, self-reflection and apology on everyone's part can create an environment of compassion and loving kindness.

5. Facilitation

It is often useful to invite a neutral witness or mediator to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness providing a calm presence or may be an active mediator who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunities to speak. This person might also point out the difference between statements of opinion and interpretation and direct statements of how an event or feeling was or is actually experienced. Facilitators can be anyone whom both parties respect; e.g., preceptors, the Abbot or people outside of PSZC who are trained in mediation.

Formal Process for Addressing Grievances at PSZC between Members/Participants

1. Submission in Writing

If a conflict has not been successfully resolved, one or both parties should bring the dispute to a member of the Ethics Committee. The parties will be asked to submit an explanation of the conflict, in writing, giving pertinent contact information, description of the conflict or grievance, attempts to resolve the conflict informally, and the desired outcome.

2. Notification

The committee member receiving the dispute will notify the other members of the Ethics Committee within seven days. Any committee member having a conflict of interest will step down; another Sangha member will be appointed by the Board to take that person's place.

3. Meeting and Review

A meeting or meetings will be held, with the Ethics Committee and the conflicting parties, where both parties will present their understanding of the concern. A member of the Ethics Committee will take minutes of the meeting. In deciding a case, the Ethics Committee must decide what persons, if any, besides the parties involved shall be informed about the case or aspects of the case. (See confidentiality process as described below.)

4. Response

The Ethics Committee is committed to giving the involved parties regular notice about the committee's progress. The expectation is that within one month of receiving the dispute, the Ethics Committee will meet with the involved parties and will read and present, in writing, a statement of their decision and reasons for the decision. The decision will be made by a majority vote of the Committee.

A designated member of the Ethics Committee will be responsible for coordinating communication with the parties. The Ethics Committee will

communicate to the parties what responses should occur to move toward reconciliation.

Possible Responses:

- No further action needed
- Mediated resolution
- Private and/or mediated apology
- Private reprimand
- Follow-up meeting with Abbot
- Reparation when possible
- Policy change to the bylaws
- Apology to the Sangha
- Findings and action made public in the case of illegal behavior
- Period of probation or suspension from certain positions of responsibilities
- Suspension or exclusion from the Sangha

Misconduct for which there is statutory mandatory reporting in Washington will be reported to the appropriate authorities.

5. Implementation

Implementation of the recommendations must be decided on a case-by-case basis in consultation with the Abbot and the Board. The Ethics Committee will monitor the parties' progress towards complying with the committee decision and will work with the Board and involved parties towards implementation. In the case of noncompliance, the Abbot will be involved to determine next steps and the member's motivation to be part of the Sangha.

6. Appeal

Although all are expected to work from an assumption that the Ethics Committee has acted in good faith and with due diligence, either party has the right to appeal a Committee decision within thirty days of being notified. The appeal must be in writing, explaining why the Ethics Committee's decision is incorrect and setting forth the basis of the appeal. Appeals will be granted if there is evidence of bias, procedural irregularities or if new information not previously available comes to light. Appeals are made to the Chair of the Board of Directors. The Board will review the findings and the

appeal argument/s to decide whether or not the decision of the Ethics Committee shall be upheld. If the Board decides to overturn the current Ethics Committee decision, due to any of the reasons stated above, the Board will then determine the best response by majority vote and inform all parties involved. The decision of the Board is considered final.

Confidentiality during the Formal Process

In investigating a case, the Ethics Committee will decide which persons besides the parties involved will be informed about the case. Information will be shared on a need to know basis. Information relating to a person's safety will be shared with the appropriate authority if necessary.

The Ethics Committee is committed to respecting the confidentiality of the parties and will advise the parties of any need to consult other individuals to gather information. The information provided will be kept confidential for the duration of the case.

The Ethics Committee will keep records regarding the case for a period of one year or longer, upon consensus of the Committee.

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