

ETHICAL GUIDELINES AND GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

INTRODUCTION

Seattle Soto Zen (“SSZ”) is part of the greater Soto Zen community, brought to Japan by Eihei Dogen in the 13th century and established in the United States in the 20th century by several teachers, including Suzuki Roshi and Katagiri Roshi. This document contains SSZ’s Ethical Guidelines, which apply to all practitioners of the SSZ Sangha, including priests. The purpose of these guidelines is to promote a healthy and supportive environment for Zen Buddhist practice at SSZ, allowing practitioners to deepen their meditation practice and their relationship with the three treasures of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. These Guidelines are intended to foster freedom of expression, respect for fellow practitioners, and a commitment to the safety and dignity of all who practice with us. They also outline specific grievance procedures for situations in which ethical guidelines have allegedly been breached. Our practice and our community are strengthened by being inclusive and welcoming. All people who come to us with a sincere wish to study Zen are valued and respected. The Three Refuges, the Three Pure Precepts, and the Ten Prohibitory Precepts form the foundation of the ethical commitments through which we respect each person as a unique expression of Buddha nature, regardless of age, race, gender, ethnicity, appearance, sexual orientation, or physical ability.

THREE REFUGES

1. I take refuge in Buddha.
2. I take refuge in Dharma.
3. I take refuge in Sangha.

THREE PURE PRECEPTS

1. I vow to do no harm.
2. I vow to do good.
3. I vow to free all beings.

TEN PROHIBITORY PRECEPTS

1. I take up the way of not killing.

2. I take up the way of not stealing.
3. I take up the way of not misusing sexuality.
4. I take up the way of not speaking falsely.
5. I take up the way of not being deluded and not intoxicating self and others.
6. I take up the way of not talking about others' errors or faults.
7. I take up the way of not elevating self and blaming others.
8. I take up the way of not being stingy and not attaching to anything, even the truth.
9. I take up the way of not indulging in anger.
10. I take up the way of not thinking ill of the three treasures (Buddha, Dharma, Sangha).

I. ETHICAL GUIDELINES

A. Responsibilities of All Members of the Community

The entire community shares in the responsibility to foster an environment of integrity and dignity. This involves refraining from behaviors that cause harm to oneself, other community members or the community as a whole, such as theft, violent or destructive behavior or speech, or sexual improprieties.

Anyone participating in an SSZ or SSZ-sponsored event is expected to be mindful of these guidelines.

B. Confidentiality and Mindful Communication

All SSZ practitioners should expect that their explorations of the dharma will be supported by mutual trust and open communication. Intimate consultation with priests and lay teachers and sharing of personal information with other practitioners will occur; consequently, being mindful about the manner in which information is communicated is a significant part of our practice together.

SSZ teachers and practice leaders shall not disclose information they receive in one-to-one meetings with practitioners or when confidentiality is requested and agreed to, unless serious harm may result to individuals or to the Sangha if the information is not disclosed and/or disclosure is required by law. Consultation among teachers regarding matters that are not strictly confidential may

be appropriate; all those who engage in such consultations should make every effort to ensure it is done in a sensitive, fair and respectful manner.

Practitioners are expected to exercise discretion when talking about matters brought up in practice discussion and to respect personal views shared in other forums.

C. Special Obligations of Board Members

Board members are elected and considered the administrative and financial leadership of the Sangha. Although board members are not required to make a formal commitment to the precepts, as in Jukai, board members are expected to follow and be particularly mindful of how their conduct affects individual Sangha members, as well as the Sangha as a whole. Board members are expected to discharge their duties in accordance with all applicable laws. Financial or sexual improprieties will not be tolerated. Board members, during their tenure, agree not to become sexually or romantically involved with new practitioners who have practiced with the Sangha for less than six months. If a particular board member has been approached with a grievance from a practitioner, that board member will promptly ensure that this grievance is communicated to the SSZ Ethics Committee and will maintain confidentiality in the process.

D. Special Obligations of Teachers

Priests and lay teachers hold special positions of trust. Misconduct by these individuals can significantly undermine the integrity of the entire community. Therefore, priests and lay teachers will refrain from any sexual or romantic involvement with currently practicing SSZ practitioners. The only exception will be prior relationships. Because of the nature of their spiritual relationship with practitioners, the expectation of trust, and the power differential inherent in practitioner-teacher relationships, priests and lay teachers are expected to uphold the highest ethical standards in the community, to practice right conduct in their relationships, and to maintain utmost confidentiality. There is the highest expectation that priests and lay teachers will be guided by the precepts in all actions and will, in particular, refrain from: behavior that harms other community members or the community as a whole; theft or other unlawful behavior; violent or destructive behavior or speech; or sexual improprieties.

E. Special Obligations of Senior Practitioners

Senior Practitioners share a special responsibility in guiding the life of the Sangha. Their own ethical behavior should reflect the highest level of commitment and serve as an example to others in the community. It is expected that they will strive to follow the precepts at all times in their interactions with the Sangha, and refrain from: behavior that harms other community members or the community as a whole; theft or other unlawful behavior; violent or destructive behavior or speech; or sexual improprieties.

Senior Practitioners include: members of the Practice Council, the Ino, those who teach the introductory class on Sunday mornings, who give talks, or teach other classes offered by SSZ. Those who give a way-seeking mind talk or participate in the Doan Ryo (i.e., perform service positions) are not necessarily Senior Practitioners for purposes of this Policy. Senior Practitioners agree not to become sexually or romantically involved with new practitioners who have practiced with the Sangha for less than six months.

II. GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES

A. Ethics Committee

The SSZ Ethics Committee has the responsibility of attending to all grievances and reconciliation processes. It is a standing committee of two SSZ members, at least one of which is on the Board of Directors. Membership on the Ethics Committee is determined by the Board of Directors, and in the absence of a working Committee, the Board of Directors shall act as the Ethics Committee. Ethics Committee appointments will last one year.

B. Resolution of Minor Grievances

Sangha members are encouraged to resolve minor grievances among themselves in a spirit of compassion and forgiveness, if necessary by choosing a third party to facilitate the discussion. However, in cases of serious alleged ethical breach, members are encouraged to report to the Ethics Committee.

C. Reporting Grievances

Grievances may be made orally or in writing. Anyone wishing to file a grievance regarding a breach of the ethical guidelines should report the grievance to one of the following: a teacher, any member

of the Ethics Committee, or any member of the SSZ Board of Directors. The person who receives the grievance shall promptly report it to the Ethics Committee. The grievance will be treated in as confidential a manner as possible with the understanding that the identity of the person making the grievance and the details of the grievance may need to be disclosed in the process of investigation or in subsequent proceedings as required by law or as necessary for the protection of SSZ.

When a grievance has been reported to the Ethics Committee, the Committee will decide whether to initiate procedures for 1) informal investigation and resolution, or 2) formal investigation and resolution. This will depend on the seriousness of the alleged ethical breach and the desires of the parties concerned.

D. Process for Informal Investigation and Resolution

The Ethics Committee should first explore, where feasible, whether the grievance can be resolved in an informal manner that is acceptable to the parties concerned. This will involve investigation of the case by the Ethics Committee, followed by discussions involving and mediated by the Ethics Committee. If the grievance cannot be resolved in this manner, it will be referred to the Formal Investigation and Resolution process.

E. Process for Formal Investigation and Resolution

Where an informal resolution is not possible, the Ethics Committee shall form a full Formal Investigation and Resolution Committee (FIRC), composed of five members: the two members of the standing Ethics Committee, one Sangha member chosen by each of the two parties, and a Sangha teacher.

The FIRC will investigate the grievance, typically by conducting interviews with the aggrieved party, the alleged offending party, and witnesses if applicable. These interviews may be done by the full committee, by a member of the committee designated to carry out this task, or by any other person designated by the committee. A detailed record will be kept of any interviews or other investigation. In matters involving allegations of sexual misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or other serious charges, the FIRC will consult with the Board of Directors to the extent practicable concerning the appropriate process for fact-finding. The Chair of the FIRC and Chair of the Board of Directors shall also be responsible for seeking appropriate legal counsel in such situations.

When the investigation is completed, the FIRC shall consider what responsive action is required.

The FIRC may seek guidance and input from the Board of Directors or a teacher, where it is deemed appropriate. In cases involving allegations of sexual misconduct, misappropriation of funds, or other serious charges, the FIRC shall report the grievance to the Board of Directors and the Board shall be ultimately responsible for the determination of the outcome, with appropriate input from the FIRC.

Possible responsive actions include, but are not limited to:

- Mediated resolution of the matter (assuming that the parties involved are willing);
- A finding of no ethical breach while acknowledging the existence of a problem which needs resolution elsewhere;
- Private or mediated apology;
- Reparation, to the extent possible, to the person who brought the grievance and/or to the community;
- Follow-up meeting with the person's teacher;
- A recommendation for participation in a recovery process (i.e., a drug or alcohol recovery program or a 12 Step program) specified by the FIRC;
- Private reprimand;
- Public censure (this involves the findings and action of the FIRC, as well as the reprimand, being made public to the community, following the approval of the Board of Directors);
- Public apology to the SSZ community or membership;
- Period of probation, with probationary terms set by the FIRC or the Board of Directors;
- Suspension from positions of responsibility within SSZ;
- Suspension from participation at SSZ for a stipulated period of time (such a suspension should include a statement regarding the conditions by which a person may re-enter the community and the SSZ entity or person(s) who will be responsible for deciding whether those conditions have been fulfilled); and/or
- Termination of the person's office, employment, or relationship with SSZ.

F. Decisions Reserved for Teachers

Certain ethical transgressions may result in sanctions that involve an individual's spiritual path. The decision regarding whether such sanctions are to be imposed rests solely with the individual's teacher.

III. RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Our intention is to offer a reconciliation policy guided by basic principles of Zen Buddhism such as non-separation, interdependence, compassion for all beings, and upholding the precepts.

What follows is an outline of a step-by-step process by which a person who has become separated from the community, including a person who has committed an ethical breach and has been asked to stay apart from the community, could be reconciled with and possibly reintegrated into the community.

The party expresses a desire for reconnection and brings a request to the Ethics Committee or Sangha Teacher to engage in the reconciliation process. This request includes the expression of a desired outcome.

The Ethics Committee, acknowledging that they are not trained professionals in this area and utilizing outside resources where appropriate, does their best to determine whether the person making the request has accomplished the following:

- Demonstrated empathy for the others involved in the conflict.
- Demonstrated understanding of the harm that may have resulted from the person's actions and accepted responsibility for it.
- Where appropriate, committed to or completed specific practices or therapies intended to help the person make more skillful and appropriate choices in the future.
- Where appropriate, made or is prepared to make satisfactory amends for the harm that resulted from the person's actions.
- The Ethics Committee may seek guidance from the Sangha Teacher and/or the Board of Directors with regard to actions or amends that may be appropriate to address the last two points in any particular situation.

If the Ethics Committee is satisfied that the points laid out in step #2 above have been accomplished, it invites the other person or people who were involved in the situation to explore their interest in participating in the reconciliation process.

Based on the guiding principles, the Ethics Committee determines a format for bringing the people together which has a reasonable likelihood of achieving the desired outcome. The Ethics Committee, or its designee, may act as an intermediary between parties in order to arrive at a format acceptable to all. Examples of possible formats include Sangha council, a meeting of the parties with a neutral facilitator, or meeting of the parties with the Ethics Committee.

The Ethics Committee evaluates whether the process enabled the parties to reach their desired outcome, whether reconciliation has been realized, and whether reintegration of a separated person into the community is appropriate.

If the process is successful, the Ethics Committee may, where appropriate, make an announcement that acknowledges the reconciliation and/or request that a teacher authorize or conduct a ceremony to acknowledge it. If the Ethics Committee believes the process has been unsuccessful, it informs the parties of that view and may invite them to renew their request when they feel ready to do so.