

# **ETHICS GUIDELINES AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION FOR THE ARCATA ZEN GROUP**

## **Introduction**

**The Bodhisattva precepts serve as the guiding principles for right conduct, right speech and right sangha relations. Practice is based on trust, safety, respect and true communication. We offer the following to nurture an atmosphere where people can practice without fear or distraction, where dharma comes first and where kalyanamitta is fostered.**

**In the course of sangha activities misunderstandings, conflicts and unethical behavior may occur. It is with this in mind that the Board of Directors is proposing the creation of an Ethics and Reconciliation (ERC) Committee. The intent of the following procedures is to maintain and when necessary restore harmony within the sangha. These procedures are designed to promote reconciliation between sangha members in cases of interpersonal conflict or for exploration and clarification of ethical issues.**

## **Precepts in Sangha Life**

**We recognize that the foundation of spiritual life rests upon our mindful and caring relationships to the life around us. The following guidelines are based on the precepts that underlie our Buddhist practice.**

### **Refraining from Killing**

**We acknowledge the interconnectedness of all beings and our respect for all life. We agree to refine our understanding of not killing and**

**nonharming in all our actions, especially not harming the body or feelings of another.**

**We commit ourselves to fulfilling this precept in the spirit of reverence for life and acknowledging our role, either directly or in complicity with others, in the killing of other forms of life. As a sangha, when institutional questions of killing animals, plants and insects arise, we must carefully consider our real needs and our bodhisattva-inspired responsibilities to work for the benefit of all beings.**

### **Refraining from Stealing**

**We agree to not take that which does not belong to us and to respect the property of others. We agree to bring consciousness to the use of all the earth's resources in a respectful and ecological way. We agree to be honest in our dealings with money and not to misappropriate money committed to dharma projects. We agree to honest stewardship of sangha money and assets. We agree to offer teachings without favoritism in regard to student's financial circumstances.**

### **Refraining from False Speech**

**We agree to speak that which is true and useful. In a small community great harm can come from speech that is inconsistent with the precepts. Mutual respect and trust are built when all speak compassionately and observe the clear mind precepts regarding right speech: refraining from lies, gossip (self-serving talk), slander, angry or abusive speech, and apportioning blame.**

### **Refraining from Intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness**

**It is clear that substance abuse is the cause of much suffering. We agree that there should be no use of intoxicants by participants during retreats. As a general rule, intoxicants will not be part of social gatherings of the sangha. The residents in the AZG house have agreed in**

**their lease to be respectful and moderate in their use of intoxicants while in the house, and no illegal intoxicants will be used at any time. We agree not to abuse or misuse intoxicants at any time. We agree that if any concern arises regarding a drug or alcohol dependency problem in a teacher or practice leader, it should be promptly brought to the attention of the Board President so it can be immediately assessed and addressed.**

### **Refraining from Sexual Misconduct**

**We agree to avoid creating harm through sexuality and to avoid sexual exploitation. Special care must be taken when people of unequal status or authority enter into a personal relationship because those in a formal role may have a clear advantage or influence in such relationship. All teachers and those in leadership positions agree not to use their teaching role or to exploit their authority and position in order to promote a sexual relationship with a student.**

### **Procedures for Grievance and Reconciliation**

**We wish our life within the AZG sangha to express our Zen practice and bodhisattva intention. As the bodhisattva path is our heartfelt response to suffering, then turning away or skimming over suffering through silence, rationalization, assigning blame, minimizing, feeling self-deprecating guilt, or not listening deeply to its causes and conditions are all steps directed away from the bodhisattva path. Furthermore, avoidance is a condition for additional suffering.**

**Thus, when a conflict, grievance, dissonance or violation of the precepts arises in our interpersonal relationships it is essential to attend to it fully. Individually, this involves waking up to our own contribution to the suffering in these situations through understanding our reactions, emotions and attachments. Collectively, this involves taking the time to**

**discuss the conflict with the other parties in an attempt to clarify the actual causes, conditions, feelings and responses that come together in a situation.**

**What follows are guidelines and procedures for resolving conflicts and transgressions within the AZG sangha. It is our hope that such resolution takes the form of reconciliation with oneself and with others. Whenever possible, disputes and disagreements should be resolved informally and directly between the people involved. In this document, we offer some suggestions and basic guidelines.**

**We recognize that for certain grievances, complaints and conflicts, informal resolution may not be possible. We offer a formal grievance procedure, available through the Ethics and Reconciliation Committee (ERC) for such situations. These formal procedures can be used to resolve disputes concerning administrative decisions or actions, and for addressing perceived misconduct of sangha members.**

### **Guidelines for Informal Conflict Resolution**

**The suggestions that follow are intended to give all persons involved in a dispute a chance to be fully heard in an environment of respect and kindness. We make these suggestions because we understand that despite differences of opinions we meet in the identity of our Buddha nature.**

**It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or mediators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness, providing a sense of calm and presence, or may be an active mediator who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunity to speak. Invited facilitators can be anyone whom both parties respect: e.g., neutral acquaintances, people trained in mediation or members of the ERC council. If a person would like counsel on whether an informal conflict resolution meeting is necessary then one or more of the following people are available to discuss the matter**

**privately: members of the ERC Council, Eugene Bush, Head Teacher for the AZG and Rose Brewster, Senior Priest.**

### **Being Heard**

**It is important that everyone is given the opportunity to be fully heard. This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of the conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Each person should have a chance to speak, uninterrupted by questions or comments from others. Taking calm, deliberate and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for reconciliation to begin.**

### **Restating What was Heard**

**To ensure that everyone understands 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.**

### **Acknowledgment of Shared Responsibility**

**Resolution and reconciliation is greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how he or she may have contributed to the conflict and then explains this to the other. Self-reflection by all can provide a safer, more trusting environment for everyone.**

### **Mutual Agreement on Action**

**Both parties to the grievance will mutually agree how to prevent the problem from arising again and decide on a procedure if the problem does happen again.**

## **Formal Grievance Procedure**

**A formal grievance procedure is available when informal attempts at reconciliation have been exhausted or deemed inappropriate. The primary purpose of the formal grievance procedure is to come to a decision regarding the specific issue or complaint submitted.**

**The Ethics and Reconciliation Committee, a subcommittee of the AZG Board, receives formal grievances. The ERC consists of three members appointed by the Board: at least one Board member, and two other AZG members. Its task is to resolve conflicts and promote harmony in the sangha, not to assign blame or mete out punishment.**

**A formal grievance is initiated in the following way: (1) A written complaint is given to the President of the AZG Board, describing the alleged behavior, and including a summary of informal attempts used to try to resolve the conflict. (2) The ERC meets within thirty days, reviews the complaint, and decides whether a formal grievance procedure is warranted or whether other informal channels should be attempted first. If necessary, the ERC may request further information from the person filing the complaint. (3) If the ERC agrees that a formal grievance procedure is warranted, one or more meetings are then held with the ERC and the parties involved in the grievance.**

**All ethical concerns will be handled seriously and confidentially. ERC members will work out the form of any discussions on a case-by-case basis after consulting with the individuals involved. Any resolution or action that follows evaluation will also be handled on a case-by-case basis. If legal or procedural steps need to be taken to address the grievance then the ERC will advise the Board as to the recommended action.**