

## Zen River Sangha Ethical Guidelines

“What is most essential is the practice of Dhyana, meditative mindfulness, which enables us to experience the Absolute Purity of our deepest nature and to hold that transpersonal truth in the complexity of our personal lives.”

~Jun Po~

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For more information on this document, as well as for advice and consultation on any ethical questions and concerns you may have, please contact a member of the Board of Directors.

### Definitions

Dharma Teacher: A “dharma teacher” is any Roshi, Osho, priest or priest novice.

Student: A “Student” is any sangha member who chooses to seek insight, advice and teaching from a dharma teacher.

Sangha Member: Anyone who comes to sangha events or gatherings with the intention to practice.

### Ethical Guidelines

Using the Three Refuges and the Hollow Bones Rinzai Zen Precepts as our outline, Zen River Sangha members are asked to consider the many ways in which our practice informs our life and our actions. The following guidelines are not intended to limit our practice or our understanding of the precepts; rather, these guidelines represent key aspects of harmonious and honest community life that require great care and compassion as we choose our actions.

#### The Three Refuges

*I take refuge in the absolute purity of this awakened mind. (Buddha)*

Within the sangha there are variations of religious hierarchy and administrative responsibility. However, we acknowledge the equal and fundamental expression of Buddha nature in all beings.

*I take refuge in this practice of pure selfless awareness, wisdom, compassion and skillful means. (Dharma)*

We acknowledge the wisdom of the Dharma and the bodhisattva path, expressed to us by the teachings of the Buddha and all of the matriarchs and patriarchs—those of our lineage as well as

those of other lineages, traditions, and teachings that carry the pure expression of the Dharma. We evidence respect for those who choose paths other than Buddhism.

*I take refuge in this awakening community and our realization in the truth of the interconnection, interpenetration and interdependency of all sentient and insentient beings everywhere. (Sangha)*

We acknowledge the preciousness and centrality of our practice community in our lives. We endeavor to create a community built on transparency and compassion. We evidence respect for all members of our sangha regardless of variations in gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, political opinion, abilities and appearances.

### **The Precepts**

*1. Affirm Life ~ I respect all sentient and insentient beings and always act with compassion towards them. In order to live, it is necessary for me to take life. I do so with reverence for the life taken. In gratitude, I do not take my own life for granted.*

The affirmation of life includes choosing responses to conflict other than physical, verbal or psychological violence, threats, malice, abuse, and extreme displays of anger.

No firearms or other weapons are permitted at any sangha gatherings or events.

*2. Act Generously ~ I act with generosity and openhandedness. I receive only things that are freely given to me. I remember that clinging and attachment are the root of suffering.*

The adoption of this precept precludes the misuse, misappropriation, or wrongful possession of any and all community assets.

Those with institutional rank and/or administrative authority will take care that they do not use their authority to achieve privileges or powers that negatively affect others.

*3. Be Loving ~ I am conscious and loving in all of my relationships. In sexuality, I discern the difference between love and lust and do not take advantage of other human beings. I transform the arising of lust into true loving.*

While we acknowledge that sexuality is an aspect of life and practice, the sangha strives to avoid situations that carry the potential for great harm and confusion. Special care is required when persons of unequal religious or administrative authority or status, be it perceived or institutionalized, enter into relationships.

It is prohibited for any adult of Zen River Sangha to engage in sexual behavior with a minor; all responsibility for avoiding this behavior lies with the adult. Any violation will be reported to the appropriate secular authorities.

While relationships between a dharma teacher and a sangha member are not expressly forbidden, care must be taken and transparency evidenced due to the potential for exploitation and misuse of authority. If there is intention on the part of a dharma teacher and sangha member to engage in a romantic or sexual relationship, counsel must be sought with the head dharma teacher. In the event that there is any conflict of interest or involvement with the head dharma teacher, the matter must be brought to the Board of Directors. Furthermore, it is expected that the sangha member deeply consider establishing a relationship as a student with an alternate teacher, and that the dharma teachers encourage this. It is also expected that any romantic or sexual relationship between a dharma teacher and a sangha member be made public knowledge with allowances made for the hearing of questions and concerns from other sangha members. This process of counsel and transparency provides compassionate attention and support directed at a complicated situation.

Long-term members of the sangha are further encouraged to refrain from engaging in sexual or romantic relationships with new members of the sangha. A period of six months of regular attendance is advised before such a relationship is begun and seeking counsel with a dharma teacher beforehand is strongly encouraged. This allows new members the safety, space, and time needed to establish a strong practice of their own and to feel confident of their individual inclusion in the sangha.

The practice of this precept precludes sexual harassment and other inappropriate behavior, including continued romantic or sexual overtures after one has been informed such actions are unwelcome.

It is considered a potential conflict of interest for any dharma teacher to undertake or maintain a teacher/student relationship with someone who is directly responsible for the teacher's continued outside employment or livelihood or dependent on the teacher for continued outside employment or livelihood. Advice in such situations should be sought from the head dharma teacher and/or the Board of Directors.

It is essential that, in all relationships, the integrity of the sangha be considered and served. Concerns of exploitation, predatory or inappropriate behavior, misuse of authority and conflicts of interest undermine the trust and warmth of the sangha and must be addressed with all care and speed.

*4. Manifest Truth ~ I honor honesty and truth. I speak with integrity from the depth of my heart.*

We strive for transparency and honesty in all community interactions. A sangha member who has a grievance that cannot be reconciled informally has the right to bring the matter before the Board of Directors for the investigating and adjudicating of the grievance.

We endeavor to act at all times in a manner that supports and upholds trust, warmth, compassion and safety within the sangha.

*5. Respect Clarity ~ I act at all times with mindfulness and clarity. I do not abuse my body or cloud my mind with the misuse of intoxicants.*

We acknowledge that clarity of mind is crucial to the maintenance of our precepts and guidelines. We respect and support those who choose to live life without intoxicants and offer assistance to those who have concerns of addiction. While our sangha has no strict prohibitions on the mindful use of intoxicants, true intoxication of any sort is not welcome at sangha gatherings or events. Additionally, it is the responsibility of all sangha members to abide by all local, state and federal laws at sangha gatherings or events.

*6. Honor Silence ~ I remember the preciousness of silence. I see the perfection in others and refrain from gossip and frivolous conversation. I remain thoughtful and mindful of the effects of my speech.*

Information shared in confidence, including the student's contributions to conversations in daisan/dokusan, is not to be shared casually. Unless there is threat of harm that requires the sharing of such information, the integrity of our communications must be maintained.

We take care to avoid gossip, lies, slander, inappropriate comments and unskillful conversation and take care to address and reconcile any instances of wrongful speech.

*7. Celebrate Others ~ I rejoice in the good fortune of others. I do not, through my thoughts, words or actions, separate myself from others through coveting, envy or jealousy.*

We carefully examine our personal motives before sharing criticism with others and take care to do so in a compassionate manner. We allow and encourage the acknowledgement and celebration of significant events, rites of passage, joys and concerns of sangha members.

*8. Be Giving ~ I give generously of myself, sharing freely my love, my gifts, my talents and my abundance for the benefit of all. I do not selfishly withhold. I do not add any more suffering to the world.*

We acknowledge that our personal resources, regardless of the form they take, are crucial to the existence and growth of the sangha. We strive to cultivate a community where members feel comfortable reaching out to others for advice, assistance, support, and we celebrate and utilize the strength of our diverse talents and backgrounds.

It is considered a potential conflict of interest for any member of the sangha to personally benefit from gifts, sales, kickbacks, referrals, investments or purchases made by the sangha. Advice should be sought from the head dharma teacher and/or the Board of Directors.

*9. Embodiment Compassion ~ I recognize and enlighten my greed, anger and ignorance. I transform my negative emotions and act with equanimity, sympathetic joy, compassion and loving kindness.*

We search for and acknowledge our shadow states, taking care not to allow ill will, resentment, malice, or vengeful thoughts to persist within us. We seek resolution openly in the event of conflict and consider criticism and counsel graciously when it is given.

*10. Steward the Earth ~ I hold sacred this planet Earth. I seek to understand Nature's interconnections and celebrate my own interdependency. I work toward achieving a lifestyle that gives more back to this Earth than I take from it.*

We take great care in our use of resources, considering our true needs and our myriad options before engaging in consumption.

We will engage in open and skillful consideration of any and all institutional decisions that may cause the use of considerable resources and/or the taking of plant and animal life or habitat.

*11. Manifest this Way ~ I hold precious this Sangha and the sacred life we embody, especially these three treasures:*

*This absolute purity  
of our Awakened Mind!  
(Buddha)*  
*This life filled with wisdom,  
compassion and skillful means!  
(Dharma)*  
*This never-ending mystery  
of life unfolding!  
All brothers, all sisters, all beings!  
(Sangha)*

We acknowledge that the three treasures are inseparable from one another and that our practice and awakening supports, affects and informs the sangha just as the sangha supports, affects, and informs our practice and awakening. We take care not to abuse or devalue these treasures out of respect for ourselves and our community. We at all times strive to remember our fearless heart, our path of wisdom, compassion, nonviolence and skillful means.