

Ocean Mind Sangha Ethical Guidelines and Grievance and Reconciliation Process

As practitioners of the dharma, we gather in community to study and practice the Buddhist teachings with the intent to liberate ourselves and to support others in their own path to awakening. With awareness of this fact, we in the Ocean Mind Sangha agree to adhere to these Ethical Guidelines—a code based on principles of trust, integrity, inclusivity, justice, respect, and accountability—in order to nurture an atmosphere supportive of the practice of the dharma. We also acknowledge that although these guidelines apply to all of us, they are particularly important for teachers, given that this leadership role gives rise to a power differential in relationships with students and other sangha members, and for that reason alone, their words and actions can carry great weight.

We agree to take responsibility for our actions and to let these guidelines inform all aspects of our practice in the Ocean Mind Sangha.

I. Ethical Guidelines

1. *Confidentiality.* The relationship between student and teacher often involves the sharing of highly sensitive personal information. Respect for the student and for the relationship requires that teachers maintain such information in confidence. Despite the foregoing, if a teacher has reason to believe that a student has an intention to harm themselves or others, it's the teacher's responsibility to alert the proper authorities.

2. *Power.* Both teachers and students have an obligation to educate themselves about the potential for perceived power dynamics in the teacher/student relationship, as well as the effects of that power and its exercise. A teacher should be especially aware of the potential for the subtle or overt abuse of power that may arise in relation to their personal interests.

3. *Right Speech*. Mutual respect is foundational for an environment supportive of sound practice. Such respect is manifested when sangha members treat others with dignity and engage others truthfully and compassionately with a positive intention. Sangha harmony is promoted when the teacher models, and all members observe, the clear mind precepts regarding right speech: refraining from lies, self-serving talk, slander, angry or abusive speech, and apportioning blame.

4. *Self-Awareness*. Teachers and students should aspire to constant clarity of mind. Because of the demands of their teaching responsibilities, teachers have an obligation to engage in self-monitoring and self-care, engaging in activities that balance the teaching role with grounding in regular practice and study of the dharma, leisure, engagement in family responsibilities, and the establishment of a relationship with another teacher with whom they can discuss and reflect on their work as teachers.

5. *Boundaries*. Neither teachers nor students should violate trust or use power or their position for personal gain or self-satisfaction. The ultimate responsibility for maintaining appropriate and clear boundaries between teacher and student always rests with the teacher. When a teacher is asked to act in a capacity that calls for competencies beyond their expertise, they will refer students accordingly, i.e. to a therapist, lawyer, etc.

6. *Dual Relationships*. Students, and especially teachers, should be alert to maintaining appropriate boundaries and carefully consider the implications and dangers of dual relationships. Examples of dual relationships include romantic, financial, therapeutic, and professional relationships, as well as intimate friendships. To protect the integrity of the sangha and the teacher-student relationship, if a teacher wishes to initiate an intimate relationship with another person, they may not do so with any active formal student or member of the Ocean Mind Sangha.

7. *Accountability and Governance.* Maintaining the wellbeing of the sangha is the mutual responsibility of all members and requires active participation in governance. Teachers will support the sangha's chosen governance structure and will act to further the goals of accountability and transparency in all areas, including finances, decision making, and consideration of grievances, including allegations of ethical misconduct.

8. *Transparency.* Transparency is crucial to maintain balance and harmony within the sangha. Teachers will be alert to potential conflicts of interest with students and other members of the sangha and will act in such a way as to avoid them (see section on Dual Relationships above). When conflicts of interest do arise, they will be promptly disclosed to the Ethics Committee. Examples of this might include: a member of the Ocean Mind offering a large donation or an expensive vacation to a teacher, wanting to partner in a business venture, or otherwise wishing to significantly engage in a way that lies outside the bounds of the teacher-student relationship. In such an event, the teacher will discuss the situation with the Ethics Committee to obtain consensus on how to proceed.

In all dealings with students, teachers will keep uppermost their aspiration to awaken and their vow to help students in their path of practice and realization.

2. Grievance and Reconciliation Process

Any practitioner within the Ocean Mind Sangha who believes that the teacher, a student, or practitioner has misused their power, sexuality, or financial or material resources, may report their concerns to the Ethics Committee by emailing omsethicscommittee@protonmail.com. This inbox will be checked regularly by the Committee, whose members are currently Brian Ryusan Pontolilo, Jessica Tsipe Angelson, and Adam Kaito Green.

If a person wishing to file a complaint isn't sure if an issue warrants a formal grievance, they can consult with the Ethics Committee at any time by using the above address.

Upon receiving a grievance, the Ethics Committee will meet to review the concerns and decide on next steps in a confidential process intended to fully address the concerns of the aggrieved party. First, the Ethics Committee will meet individually with all parties to clarify the details of the grievance. In situations involving an abuse of power, or where a transgressor has clear seniority, the Ethics Committee will then work to center the experience of the aggrieved party, to provide safety for their practice within the sangha, and to support them in their attempts to articulate and seek redress.

When needed, the Ethics Committee may ask to speak with relevant third parties, for example a bystander who observed the incident, or individuals who have experienced similar incidents with the current transgressor. Based on this, the Ethics Committee will formulate and offer recommendations to address the harm, restore harmony to the aggrieved party's experience of sangha and practice, educate the transgressor about the impact of their actions, and prevent similar harms.

The Ethics Committee is authorized to carry out their recommendations in any manner that it regards appropriate. Examples of decisions include: requesting a formal apology to the parties

involved or the sangha, removal from a leadership role, temporary suspension pending a change in behavior, or any other action that addresses the issue. The Ethics Committee is also authorized to decide which, if any, of their findings need to be made known to the wider sangha, always considering the wishes of the aggrieved party.

The Ethics Committee recommendations will be shared with the teacher and offered to the parties involved in the incident. The Ethics Committee will conduct a three- or six-month follow-up with the parties involved to review the status of the recommendations and determine if the agreed-upon steps were carried out, if additional steps are required, and if the grievance can be considered closed.

The Ethics Committee will keep notes or minutes of each meeting, storing these and all relevant documents securely to safeguard privacy.

Sources:

Brooklyn Zen Center's Formal Grievance Process

MRO's Ethical Guidelines

White Plum Asanga's Code of Ethical Conduct

New York Insight Meditation Center's Code of Ethics