

Ethics in the Sangha

EUROPEAN TEACHERS' GROUP, 2004

The primary principle guiding all Sangha relationships should be to help each other. As Dae Seon Sa Nim expressed in the marriage ceremony vows; "I vow to help you to attain your true self." When relating to others in the Sangha we must be very attuned to how our actions will affect others. The first Great Vow states our intention to help save all sentient beings. This vow can help guide our Sangha relations.

The Sangha must be free of all sexual harassment. No means no; use it mindfully and hear it clearly. Touching should be mutually agreed upon. If someone asks not to be touched, respect his or her wishes. If someone rejects even your most gentle advances, be mindful and heed their wishes. Open and honest communication is the best way to avoid misunderstandings. Listen as if you are hearing the Buddha's voice, speak with the Buddha's tongue.

Those in the Sangha who hold positions in the hierarchy — senior students as well as teachers and monks — have a special obligation to be very mindful of the potential misuse of power, money, alcohol, controlled substances and sex. Using your position to fulfil your desires is not correct relationship and is an abuse of power.

The responsibility of the Teachers: Teachers in our school have a special responsibility to take into account the welfare of students. A teacher must always ask her/himself how any action will affect the student in the long run. The recent history of Buddhist organizations everywhere shows very clearly that sexual relationships between teachers and students can lead to great pain and disharmony within the Sangha. On the other hand, many teachers have entered into loving, long-term relationships with someone who was their student. Therefore there is no easy rule to guide these relationships. The Sangha does have the right to expect that our teachers will act within the highest standards of care and mindfulness.

The Third Precept states, "*I vow to abstain from misconduct done in lust*". Lust can be defined as a self-centered action, which is "for me" and doesn't take into account the needs of another. If a teacher's relationship with a student becomes sexualized, two steps are strongly recommended:

1. There should be a 3 to 6 month suspension of the teacher /student relationship.
2. The teacher should choose another teacher in the Sangha in order to discuss the relationship and receive guidance from her/him. In this way the relationship will be witnessed by another teacher who can hold the perspective of caring for the student, the teacher and so the entire Sangha.

Teachers should act within their qualification as a Zen teacher, and not as psychologists, therapists or medical experts. If a teacher is trained as an expert in one of such fields, he/she should keep professional advice separate from the Zen teaching.

Grievance procedure:

1. If someone has a grievance involving another Sangha member, it is best for this grievance to be solved by the parties involved.
2. If this does not prove possible, then the Abbot of the local Zen Center should mediate.
3. If the Abbot is not in a position to impartially mediate then the grievance should go the Guiding Teacher of the Sangha.
4. If the Guiding Teacher is successful in solving the problem to the satisfaction of all parties, then the grievance procedure is ended.
5. If it is not solved to the satisfaction of all parties, then the grievance will be presented to the European Teachers Council.
6. The European Teachers Council will appoint a committee of members as well as the chairman of the committee. The chairman will be a teacher.
7. The committee will consist of the chairman, at least two further members – mixed genders – and include at least one student.
8. If the ethics complaint involves a member of the Teacher Group who is a monk or nun, then a monastic will be added to the ethics committee for the consideration of the matter.
9. This committee will hear all sides and will attempt to mediate.
10. If the committee finds a solution to the grievance to the satisfaction of all parties then the grievance procedure is ended.
11. If no solution is found, the European Head Teacher will be asked to offer a course of action.
12. This course of action can include one or more of:
 - a personal apology
 - an apology to the whole Sangha
 - a repentance ceremony
 - a reprimand
 - in the most serious situation, being asked to leave the Sangha.

It is hoped that the party who has acted incorrectly will see his or her mistake and apologize,

In a Sangha of human beings, it is impossible that misunderstandings and misdeeds will not occur. We are all on the Buddha Way and look to the Dharma for directions. Even in the Buddha's time it was necessary to deal with difficult situations as they arose. We must all be mindful of the impact of our actions. Greed, anger, and delusion can lead the Sangha to ruin. Be careful: love those younger than you and respect those older than you. With wisdom and compassion the Sangha can find its way.