

# **Jissoji Zen Ann Arbor, Inc.**

## **Ethics Guidelines and Grievance Procedures**

January 28, 2018

### **Preamble**

The purpose of the Ethics Guidelines and Grievance Procedures of Jissoji Zen Ann Arbor, Inc. (“Jissoji Zen Ann Arbor”) is to support and protect the well-being of the sangha members, the leaders, and the sangha as a whole. The policy relies on the sixteen precepts of Zen Buddhism as its basis.

Our practice, whether as students or teachers, is to be as awake, aware and as kind as we can be and to live in a way that fosters the well-being of everyone, with special attention to the well-being and harmony of our sangha. At Jissoji Zen Ann Arbor it is essential that an environment of trust and safety prevail so that all of us feel free to let go of the fears that hinder our clarity, and to open our hearts to the dharma.

It was for this purpose that the Buddha taught the precepts as guidelines for living in a world of interdependence, where careless actions can have serious and unintended consequences. The Sixteen Precepts are the lifeblood of our practice together and the practical principles that call for us to meet a high standard of ethical, caring conduct.

The Sixteen Precepts are a strong and flexible container and a teacher, rather than an absolute code. Rigidity and hardened positions are not conducive to healthy relationships and are not in keeping with the precepts. The precepts help us bring awareness and understanding to all our actions as we meet the ever-changing conditions of life. The bodhisattva path upon which we are walking begins with the vow to bring all beings to awakening; it is dynamic as is our commitment to live with the precepts as our constant guide.

### **The Precepts as Our Guide**

#### **Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures**

When we enter the bodhisattva path we take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha. In this context the Three Treasures refer to our teachers, the teachings and the community of those who practice together. A refuge is a safe place to turn for instruction, encouragement and clarity. As such, those who take refuge naturally expect to find there the highest ethical standards.

## **The Three Pure Precepts**

These are the Buddha's fundamental definition of enlightened action.

**I VOW TO REFRAIN FROM ALL EVIL** - It requires us to be aware of our actions and their consequences. In sangha life we each have to watch out for envy, and for competitive and judgmental attitudes, and to guard our tongue.

**I VOW TO MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO LIVE IN ENLIGHTENMENT** -It requires us to open our hearts to each other and to act on that caring. In sangha life each of us has to make an effort to listen and to do our part and act for the welfare of all beings.

**I VOW TO LIVE AND BE LIVED FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL BEINGS**- To benefit all beings is to go in the direction of living together wide awake by relinquishing our self-centered views in order to see beings as they truly are.

## **The Ten Grave Precepts**

**I VOW NOT TO KILL** - We are recipients of the precious gift of life in common with all beings. This precept goes beyond warning us about the taking of life and includes the nurturing of growth and goodness in ourselves and each other.

**I VOW NOT TO TAKE WHAT IS NOT GIVEN** - We must develop and strengthen our opportunities for generosity and acknowledge our interdependence. Misuse of the community's assets is a serious breach of trust and damages our reliance upon one another.

**I VOW NOT TO MISUSE SEXUALITY** - Personal and sexual boundaries are easily transgressed, endangering the well-being of both individuals and the entire community. Abuse of position is especially destructive and will not be tolerated at whatever level it occurs.

**I VOW TO REFRAIN FROM FALSE SPEECH** - Honesty, openness and transparency are characteristics of a community where we feel free to be open to the truth without fear.

**I VOW TO REFRAIN FROM INTOXICATION** - An unclouded mind is necessary for responsible action in all relationships including our relationship to self.

**I VOW NOT TO SLANDER** - Open communication and transparency are the ground of the mutual support and understanding that encourage trust and create a safe place to practice.

**I VOW NOT TO PRAISE SELF AT THE EXPENSE OF OTHERS** – To observe this precept is to willingly accept responsibility for mistakes that we have made and take responsibility for our role in the great web of being.

I VOW NOT TO BE AVARICIOUS – Generosity is the first step on the bodhisattva path. Attachment to status, the teachings or to a practice position leads to divisiveness in the community.

I VOW NOT TO HARBOR ILL-WILL - When allowed to grow unchecked and especially when fueled by self-righteousness, anger can cause serious damage to the harmonious functioning of the community.

I VOW NOT TO ABUSE THE THREE TREASURES – The aspiration to awaken flourishes in an environment of gratitude and respect. Our teachers, the teaching and the community are all facets of a single practice.

**We vow to be free from discrimination and to maintain an environment free of sexual harassment and the misuse of sexuality. If a teacher and/or student are considering an intimate relationship, they must suspend any teacher –student relationship immediately and seek counsel with a senior teacher.**

## **Grievance and Conflict Resolution**

An Ethics Committee shall be established to hear complaints and resolve conflicts of an ethical nature, following a tradition begun by Shakyamuni Buddha. The Committee shall be appointed by the Board with the approval of the lead priest. If a complaint involves a committee member, the Board will appoint a substitute to the Committee for that issue.

Sangha members are encouraged to try to resolve problems themselves before taking issues to the Ethics Committee. First, try to meet one-to-one with the person, with whom they have a problem, making an effort to both listen openly and speak clearly. Second, or if the first is not suitable, invite a third person, someone both parties trust, to be present and to help both parties feel safe and listen to each other. If they are unable to resolve the problem satisfactorily in this informal way, or if for other reasons they cannot take this approach, bring the problem to a member of the Ethics Committee.

The Sixteen Precepts will guide the Committee in preserving confidentiality and transparency as appropriate. A complainant can present an issue verbally or in writing to any member of the Ethics Committee; that Committee member will present the issue to the Ethics Committee and the Committee shall investigate all complaints within three days of receiving it. Information disclosed during the investigation shall be treated as confidential and only shared to the extent necessary to conduct the investigation. The complainant shall be promptly updated as soon as a decision has been reached.

The Committee shall set up investigatory procedures for dealing with situations like the following -

- When a member submits a verbal or written complaint that he/she has been subject to physical or emotional threats or unethical treatment (including sexual harassment or unwarranted sexual advances or other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature)
- When an ethical breach or conflict arises within the sangha that requires resolution
- When there is evidence that the sangha's resources are being misused
- When gossip has caused confusion and disruption within the sangha

In consultation with the complainant whenever possible, the Ethics Committee will involve other sangha members or the entire sangha, using formats such as formal mediation, as appropriate to the circumstances. Maintaining confidentiality for all parties to the highest degree possible is essential. However, confidentiality may be altered if the health and safety of the individual or the sangha is in question.

When the complaint does not involve the lead priest, she/he can be consulted for help in arriving at a proper disposition of the matter. Should a serious complaint arise concerning activities of the lead priest, a teacher from outside JissoJi Zen Ann Arbor may be asked to aid the Committee in arriving at a just resolution of the conflict. The SZBA (Soto Zen Buddhist Association) can be contacted for a referral to an outside teacher as necessary. The timely resolution of complaints and regular updates toward the complainant are overseen by the Board.

These Guidelines are based upon, with minor changes, a document adapted from the Soto Zen Buddhist Association with their generous permission.