

Ethics Statement for the SZBA

Prologue

As Soto Zen Buddhist Association Members and Associate Members we have committed ourselves to living an ethical life. Central to this vow is our effort to provide a safe haven in which we and our students may explore our true nature and create a world that expresses a joyful presence, kindness to all beings, and the deep spiritual peace that is the hallmark of Zen Buddhism. The 16 Bodhisattva Precepts* are the basic principle of our approach to ethics.

The Three Refuges

The Three Pure Precepts

The Ten Prohibitory Precepts

It is our sincere intention to realign our lives continually in accord with these precepts.

*Each center has its own translation and the SZBA does not endorse a particular translation.

Ethics Standards, Teacher Relationships, and Grievance Procedures

While the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are the foundation of our vows, ethics standards and guidelines are needed to expand on these precepts and lay out specific areas of concern and the processes for addressing difficult situations.

Ethical issues are viewed from three perspectives in the SZBA:

I. Ethical standards within our respective temples or other teaching venues.

The SZBA requires Members and Associate Members in good standing to be subject to ethical guidelines with methods of accountability, whether or not they are teaching in a temple organization. We recognize that each Sangha needs to develop and publish a set of guidelines appropriate to its circumstances. All Members and Associate Members agree to abide by an ethics policy that addresses the following concerns:

- *Diversity*
- *Fiduciary responsibility¹*
- *Sexual conduct*
- *Drugs and alcohol*
- *Use of authority*

¹ one in a position of authority who obligates himself or herself to act on behalf of another (as in managing money or property) and assumes a duty to act in good faith and with care, candor, and loyalty in fulfilling the obligation

- Procedures for Problem Resolution (including a clear way for Sangha members to address their issues including but not limited to mediation requirements)

Samples of ethics statements from different types of organizations (residential, non-residential, etc) and different sizes of organizations will be made available for reference on the website.

II. Ethical Violations and Members' Obligations to the SZBA

As Teachers within the Zen Buddhist community we have a special responsibility to ensure a safe teaching environment for our students and sangha members. Specifically, Members and Associate Members are bound by these principles:

- 1. Self-reporting Clause:** If a Member or Associate Member has been found by the member's sangha/temple to be in violation of its ethical guidelines, s/he must report this to appropriate authorities if required by state law. S/he must also report the incident, together with the sangha/temple's conclusions from its process, to the Grievance Committee of the SZBA for review. The member may be subject to suspension of Membership. Should the member not report, their sangha/temple should do so. If no sangha/temple member reports, a member not affiliated with the temple may report the violation to the Grievance Committee of the SZBA. When the violation was caused by an Associate Member, the Member who is that priest's teacher has an obligation to ensure that the incident is reported to the SZBA and, as appropriate, to civil authorities. (Please note: This clause is not to be confused with deliberate acts of civil disobedience done in accord with the Member's ethical standards. Members may want to consult with the Grievance Committee prior to a specific action.)
- 2. Illegal Activity Clause:** Any Member or Associate Member convicted of a felony will be subject to review of their membership by the Grievance Committee. When all legal obligations have been met as determined by the judicial system, the member may apply for re-instatement.
- 3. Diversity Clause:** The Members and Associate Members of the SZBA are committed to actively seeking harmony within such differences as race, class, gender, age, ability, sexual orientation, and other forms of cultural identity.

III. Teacher to Teacher Relationships

As SZBA members we agree to create and maintain respectful and collegial relationships with our fellow teachers.

- We agree to respect each other's authority within our respective teaching venues and obligations.
- When a Member entrusts a student for part of their training to another Member, that Member will be mindful of not being the primary teacher and will refrain from giving advice beyond the scope of the entrustment.

- Should teacher-to-teacher conflict arise, we agree to create and maintain reasonable dialogue with each other.

Under certain circumstances an Associate Member (or an ordained student who happens not to be registered with the SZBA) may seek to change teachers and it is always their right to do so.

- No Member working with an ordained student of another Member will give ordination, head monk trainee or dharma transmission within a two-year period of the student having ended an earlier student/teacher relationship without the written permission of the prior teacher.
- Therefore, the SZBA will not accept an application for membership (Associate or Full) within a two-year period of the applicant's having ended a prior student/ teacher relationship without such written permission from the former teacher.

1. Transfer of an ordained student with permission

- a) When a Member takes on another teacher's ordained student, s/he is required to make a reasonable effort to contact the previous teacher and receive written permission for the transfer, even after a two-year period, when practicable. The written permission will clearly state the reasons for the transfer.
- b) If the transferring student is already ordained, the prior ordination teacher will decide if the student needs to disrobe and return robes, bowls and lineage papers.
- c) If the first teacher has not required disrobing, the second teacher can make the decision to require the student to re-ordain or not.
- d) The new teacher will submit to the SZBA
 - (1) a copy of the transfer permission which includes a statement by the prior teacher giving the reason for the transfer,
 - (2) a request for transfer by the student,
 - (3) and the decision that is being made about disrobing or not.
- e) Upon receipt in good order of the information in 1(d) above, the SZBA will recognize the ordination and transmission documents for registration when submitted by the new teacher. If disrobing was not required, the original ordination date will remain in effect.

2. Transfer of an ordained student without permission

The SZBA would hope that all parties will strive to come to some understanding about the transfer of an ordained student between teachers. If there is no mutual agreement, the SZBA will cancel the associate membership. Ordination with another teacher will follow this procedure:

- a) Under those circumstances where the student and the prior ordination teacher are unable or unwilling to come to an agreement over transfer of the student to another teacher, the student will disrobe and wait two years before re-ordination.

- b) Robes and bowls will be offered back to the original ordaining teacher if said teacher had made the purchase. Lineage papers will be returned.
(Please note: Some teachers feels the robes and bowls belong to them even if they were not the purchaser. Who owns the robes and bowls should be made clear at the time of ordination.)
- c) The new teacher will submit a statement to the SZBA:
 - (1) the reasons (if known) for the transfer,
 - (2) a request for transfer by the student,
 - (3) the last date of training with the previous teacher,
 - (4) and the proposed starting date of the student training.
- d) Having received the information in 2(c) above, the SZBA will recognize the ordination or transmission documents for registration when submitted by the new teacher.

IV. Conflict Resolution and Grievances

1. The SZBA expects ethical issues within a Sangha to be worked out through the processes in effect within that Sangha, and will always try to direct complaints into those processes. A community that has been subjected to clergy misconduct or other breach of trust can be deeply injured. Should this occur, it is our recommendation that Sanghas call on specially trained interveners.
2. The SZBA will maintain a list of lay and ordained people trained as mediators who are familiar with and sympathetic to the function and purpose of Soto Zen temples and sanghas and by extension to the SZBA as a whole, and who are willing to help with clergy misconduct intervention and conflict mediation upon request. They will be available for helping resolve conflicts arising within communities and between individuals, including Member/Member, Member/Associate, Member/Sangha, and Associate/Sangha conflicts. Costs will be handled by the parties involved in the dispute.
3. Violations of the ethical guidelines in Section II above will be handled by a Grievance Committee appointed by the Board of Directors. Members of this committee are required to have appropriate training. Term of appointment is for three years and may be renewed.* Committee members will create a procedures manual with recommended preventive measures and to address ethical violations.
4. Any suspected illegal activity involving moral turpitude by a Member or Associate Member will be reported to the appropriate legal authority. We consider ourselves mandatory reporters of child and elder abuse and will always refer suspect cases to the appropriate authority. We will maintain a list of applicable laws for reference purposes only.
5. SZBA will only assume costs associated with travel by Grievance Committee members, but no others. Parties to a grievance will bear their own costs.

* Initial committee membership will create staggered terms by adding 1, 2, or 3 years to the first term appointment.

Supplemental Best Practices

The following item(s) while not rising to the level of an ethical misconduct are listed as concerns of the membership of SZBA:

1. Ordination and Transmission of family members clause:

The SZBA will not recognize ordinations or dharma transmission of spouses, those in an ongoing intimate relationship, or immediate family members except under both of the following conditions:

- a) The SZBA receives a signed statement of support by three Members who have knowledge of the situation and at least one of whom must not be within the specific lineage.
- b) The Associate has had substantial training with a non-family Member prior to dharma transmission.

2. Self ordination or transmission clause:

The SZBA will not accept applications for associate or full membership by individuals who ordain or give dharma transmissions to themselves.

All current Members and Associate Members at the date of acceptance of this ethics clause shall be considered exempt from conditions imposed herein regarding ordinations and dharma transmissions that have occurred prior to the acceptance date.