

Still Mountain Buddhist Meditation Center

Ethics Grievance and Reconciliation Process

April 21, 2017

Purpose

The purpose of a grievance process for the reconciliation of ethical issues is to confirm the importance of the sincere practice of lay precepts within our community. These are minimum behavioral standards that we may reasonably expect of each other. Taken broadly and within the full range of their meaning, the precepts provide the foundation for a healthy sangha.

Even under the best of circumstances, however, ethical lapses and misunderstandings will sometimes occur. None of us is perfect. The health of our community will not be measured so much by the presence or absence of ethical conflict as by our willingness to address issues as they arise, always within the context of a commitment to compassion and respect for each other. Serious ethical breaches are especially problematic when committed by a person of designated power within the sangha, such as a teacher or Board member.

Still Mountain fully endorses the following statement which occurs in Spirit Rock's ethics policy: "Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. Rather it is based on fully addressing the suffering of all concerned. Hurt, fear, and anger are taken seriously through forums in which everyone may speak honestly, safely, and completely about their own direct experiences and feelings. In looking for resolution, Buddhist practice values dialogue over silence, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, confession over accusation, and atonement over punishment."

Establishment of an Ethics Grievance Review and Resolution Council

Still Mountain will establish an Ethics Grievance Review and Resolution Council (the "Ethics Council") composed of at least five members of the sangha including one board member, one teacher, and at least three other sangha members. There will also be at least two backup members, any of whom may fill in for a regular member in the event such member wishes to remove herself from the deliberation process due to issues of existing relationship with either the person who is the subject of the complaint or the person who is bringing the complaint (the "parties to the complaint"). A primary role of the Ethics Council will be to provide confidential

consultation to anyone who brings forth ethical concerns regarding the behavior of another sangha member. The Council will in most cases encourage a meeting between the two parties prior to further Council consideration, to the extent such meeting is deemed appropriate given the circumstances. At least two members of the Ethics Council will be present during any conversations with any parties involved in the process (e.g., including outside experts who are consulted regarding the case, and notes will be taken summarizing such conversations.

The Council will also in some cases and at its discretion, oversee the implementation of a formal grievance procedure, as described below. The Council may elect to bring in outside expert resources as needed.

More specific procedures governing the above responsibilities will be decided upon and specified within the Ethics Council, as deemed appropriate and in consultation with the Board and Teachers Council.

Formal Grievance Process

Any person may bring forth an ethical concern to the Ethics Council by simply making contact with a member of the Council. The Council will work with the person bringing the complaint in a way that is judged to be most appropriate to the circumstances and which provides the best possible means for resolution.

If a formal grievance process is requested, a brief statement by the person bringing the complaint will include:

- A clear statement that a formal grievance process is requested
- The name of the person(s) whose behavior the complaint concerns
- A description of the alleged behavior sufficient to allow the Ethics Council to decide whether a formal grievance procedure should be initiated
- A history of the attempts, if any, to resolve the complaint through other means.
- A general statement about the resolution desired
- Signature of the person bringing the complaint
- Date

Once the Council has accepted such request, it will convey its acceptance within two weeks to both the party filing the complaint and the party named in the complaint. As part of this notification, the Council will state its understanding of the issue under inquiry and will distribute a copy of the original grievance process request to the party named in the complaint.

Ethics Council Investigation and Delivery of Findings

The Ethics Council will conduct an investigation of the issues brought forth in the complaint and will issue findings and render a decision regarding its proper resolution. At least two members of the Ethics Council will be present during any conversations with the party against whom the complaint has been brought, and notes will be taken summarizing such conversations. In addition, both parties to the complaint may name a support person who will be present at all discussions with the Ethics Committee at this point in the process. The primary functions of the named support person will be to provide emotional support as well as assistance in clarifying issues.

If the complaint involves a serious ethical lapse by a teacher or Board member, the decision regarding resolution (up to and including suspension of the teacher or Board member), will be made through consensus within the Ethics Council. In such cases, the Ethics Council may request consultative input from the Board or Teacher Council regarding the matter, but any such consultation will be nonbinding and will not infringe upon the Ethics Council's independent decision-making authority. If the complaint involves any other person acting as an agent of Still Mountain, such as a sangha member providing outreach services in the community under the auspices of Still Mountain, the Council will also render a consensus resolution as appropriate.

Parties to the complaint will have an opportunity to respond to all information gathered by the Ethics Council, as well as to all allegations and findings. The investigation and discussions among the involved parties will be held confidentially. Within two weeks of arriving at a decision regarding resolution, all involved parties will reconvene at which time the Council will distribute copies of its written findings and read them aloud. This will constitute the final disposition of the complaint. The Council will determine the process and extent to which it will inform the sangha regarding its specific findings, except that such notification shall not occur by use of the general Still Mountain email distribution list.

There may also be a separate process not described in this document that will provide for suspension or removal of a teacher from the Teacher Council, and such process will be determined and administered by that body. The sangha will be informed in the case of such action taken internally by the Teacher Council.