

# Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom

## Ethics Policy

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*“The Way of Buddha is the religion of sentient beings and Bodhisattvas. Sentient beings help Bodhisattvas engage with their delusive passions, while Bodhisattvas care for sentient beings with their sympathy and compassion. As Bodhisattvas and sentient beings become good friends to each other, non-dual mutual penetration takes place. Samsara is Nirvana, Nirvana is Samsara.”* —Ven. Samu Sunim

The Buddhist Society for Compassionate Wisdom (BSCW) promotes the belief that each and every human being has Buddha nature and that all beings are endowed with the intrinsic worth of their being. It is our mission to help each other awaken to our Buddha nature and to honor and guard our intrinsic worth. With the Buddhist precepts as our ethical guide, BSCW is committed to providing an environment of spiritual awakening that is free from physical violence, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, disparaging or discriminatory treatment, dishonesty, and substance abuse. These behaviors are incompatible with the goals of our mission.

BSCW sangha members endeavor to promote sixfold harmony within the sangha:

- Harmonize with each other in conduct and actions.
- Harmonize with each other in speech and talk.
- Harmonize with each other in intention and purpose.
- Seek peace and happiness through the cultivation of precepts.
- Seek peace and happiness through diversity of understanding.
- Seek peace and happiness through sharing spiritual and material benefits.

Regarding relationships amongst sangha members, Buddhist practitioners are encouraged to cultivate clear and open relationships with each other that are free of grasping and aversion. Practicing with this awareness is moving toward *“When there is nothing to desire, we follow the way of all Buddhas.”* The actions of pursuing another person or trying to attract another person may run counter to the spirit of the Buddhist Precepts when they are habitual, cross a boundary or a previous commitment, or when undesired by the other person. Relationships will naturally grow and develop, and some will become romantic in nature. Practicing openhandedness, established members should allow new members time to establish themselves in the community before approaching them.

Teachers of the BSCW ordain with the ten major Bodhisattva precepts as their ethical and spiritual guide, knowing that maintaining their moral and spiritual integrity as Buddhist teachers requires adherence to these precepts. Graceful manners and good deportment of religious

leaders are expected by society in general, and the good behavior and character of well-cultivated and disciplined religious leaders are edification and enlightenment itself.

With the aim of promoting and upholding the Buddhist precepts, the Bodhisattva precepts, and sixfold harmony in thoughts, words, and deeds, the BSCW acknowledges the value of establishing in writing a clear and specific set of minimum standards to which the teachers and leaders of the BSCW seek to be held accountable.

Specifically, the teachers and leaders of the BSCW commit:

- a) To use their authority as teachers and leaders in their mission to help all beings awaken to their Buddha mind, and in serving the interests of the sangha members;
- b) To treat sangha members and each other with honesty and respect, not subjecting them to disparagement, pressure, or undesired attention of any kind;
- c) To practice openness and inclusivity in their relationships with sangha members, allowing personal affinities a natural place but avoiding favoritism;
- d) To refrain from sexual interactions with sangha members except within the parameters of a committed relationship, and to refrain from expressions of sexual or romantic interest after being informed that such interest is unwelcome;
- e) To accept economic support from sangha members only when it is freely given, never in return for instruction or attention;
- f) To practice careful stewardship of the BSCW's resources, not enriching themselves by misappropriating sangha funds or assets.

These ethical guidelines are a working document, setting forth the intention of BSCW to promote an environment of teaching and training consistent with the Buddhist precepts. These guidelines are subject to careful wisdom that situations may require, and may be revised in light of experience.

# Process for Addressing Conflict and Facilitating Reconciliation

This section offers guidelines to address, resolve, and prevent the escalation of conflict within our BSCW community, developing wisdom and using our own resources to do so.

We are guided by the following principles and values:

- *Humility and sincerity*
- *Deep awareness and listening*
- *Wisdom and compassion*
- *Constant repentance is constant awakening*
- *Interconnection, integrity, trust in our buddha within*
- *Self-help and direct communication*
- *Tolerance, patience, understanding, forgiveness*
- *Sixfold harmony*
- *Samsara is Nirvana, Nirvana is Samsara*

The process aims that the parties in conflict feel supported and secure in the resolution of their complaints. All parties in a grievance should be treated with respect and dignity. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout the grievance process. However, in the interest of transparency, non-identifying information may eventually be disclosed as a part of reconciliation.

The process draws on the strengths and honors the wisdom of our teachers and long-term practitioners. We have the resources within us and within our BSCW to work through issues together within our community. The process described here allows us to restore harmony both within and without.

Throughout the grievance process and working together, we must remember that no system will save us directly. We must do that work individually and together. Our sincerity, values, purposes, and practices of simplicity and self-help, along with trusting the shared wisdom of our teachers and our BSCW, can be the ground we need to address and work through problems and conflicts.

## Definition of grievance

A grievance may be brought in a circumstance of interpersonal conflict or unethical conduct that needs attention for individuals and the community to function in harmony.

## Steps in the Grievance Reconciliation Process

### Step 1: Reflection

If you're having an issue or difficulty that needs attention, you can contact your temple's Jeolrector, local clergy, or Kalyana Mitra for a meeting. They will encourage an initial period of practice, reflection, and contemplation before moving forward. This may be just a day to allow the waters to settle within oneself to better see the path forward.

The local clergy or Kalyana Mitra will inform the temple Jeolrector of the situation.

### Step 2: Dealing Directly

After reflection, if you decide to proceed with a complaint, and where possible, the Jeolrector, local clergy, or Kalyana Mitra will arrange a meeting with you and the person to whom the complaint is directed to try to work out the problem directly, and will be present to support the parties involved. This initial direct dealing could be through a conversation, listening circle, or practice, depending on the situation.

The local clergy or Kalyana Mitra (in consultation with the Jeolrector), or Jeolrector themselves, will seek consensus in attempting to arrive at an acceptable resolution to all parties. However, if an acceptable resolution is not reached, then the parties in conflict and others involved may take the case to the next step.

(In cases where the complaint is against the Jeolrector, the Kalyana Mitra and aggrieved party shall still meet directly with the Jeolrector and attempt to resolve the conflict directly. In cases where the complaint is against the local clergy, the Kalyana Mitra and aggrieved party shall still meet directly with the local clergy and attempt to resolve the conflict directly, with the Jeolrector present. Failing this, the conflict can be raised to the next step.)

### Step 3: Senior Teachers Council

Cases where dealing directly with the grieving parties and Kalyana Mitra, local clergy, or Jeolrector has not provided a satisfactory resolution may be brought before the Senior Teachers Council. The Senior Teachers may decide to bring one or more Sangha Council members on board to hear the case, and the Senior Teachers may consult the full Sangha Council or an outside body for advice as part of its process.

The Senior Teachers Council, and Sangha Council member(s) if they are brought on board, will attempt to resolve the conflict by consensus with the parties in conflict and the Kalyana Mitra.

In cases where the Dharma Master is not a party to the conflict or grievance, the Dharma Master has veto power over the final resolution. In cases where a Senior Teacher is a party to the conflict, that Senior Teacher shall recuse him/herself from their role on the Senior Teachers Council in hearing the conflict.

*“The key to the Buddhist movement lies in the practice of love and compassion. It is easy to make mistakes and difficult to remain completely free from faults in the worldly life full of conflicts... be willing to learn from mistakes and misdeeds through moral discipline and repentance practice.” —Ven. Samu Sunim*

## Important Considerations

1. Any case involving a criminal offense will be referred to law enforcement. Additionally, members serving in roles that review grievances will be required to follow applicable “Duty to Report” laws for incidents of child abuse, elder abuse, abuse of the disabled, or other applicable issues as governed by local, state or provincial, or federal law.
2. A program of training and support is recommended for all who hear grievances. A basic training program might include:
  - Past experience in dharma training as a Dharma Guardian or other lay leader within the sangha.
  - Workshops on restorative practices, nonviolent communication, or bias training.
  - An online ethics course for spiritual leaders, rooted in Buddhist values.
  - Participation in ethics training for seminary students.
  - Procedural handbooks may be developed for use by Kalyana Mitra, Senior Teachers Council, and others participating in the conflict resolution process.
  - Wisdom-sharing at the local and BSCW levels to share experiences about different conflicts in the resolution process.
3. We acknowledge that conflicts inevitably arise and we as humans invariably make mistakes. Seek to harmonize with each other for the sake of spiritual practice and cultivation, and recognize that conflicts can be opportunities for spiritual reflection and growth and waking ourselves up from delusion.
4. Grievances and conflicts brought to this process should respectfully be given prompt attention and not allowed to linger unaddressed, recognizing that the various reconciliation steps themselves may take time.
5. Always speak to each other in a straightforward way, with kindness and compassion.
6. Local clergy or Kalyana Mitra involved in a conflict resolution should keep a basic written record of the situation, including the names of those involved, what the issues were, and proposed resolutions.
7. This grievance reconciliation process is a working document, subject to careful wisdom that situations may require, and may be revised in light of experience.

## Appendix: Parties Described in the Grievance Reconciliation Process

**Local temple clergy:** this includes the local temple Jeolrector (director) as well as Dharma Teachers and Priests active at the temple.

Role in the grievance process:

- May be a first point of contact in a difficulty. Can serve as resource to discuss and assess the seriousness of a difficulty.
- In consultation with the Jeolrector, may be responsible for arriving at an acceptable resolution to all parties at the Dealing Directly stage of the process. They are encouraged to confer with the Senior Teachers Council to encourage consistency between their views on the issue and broader Buddhist wisdom.

**Kalyana Mitra (“spiritual friend”):** two people of mature practice chosen at each Temple or location who may serve as initial points of contact in a conflict. The Kalyana Mitra will play an important role in the overall grievance and resolution process by providing a listening ear to concerns of all kinds and proposing resolutions and healing practices.

Role in the grievance process:

- In consultation with the Jeolrector, may be responsible for arriving at an acceptable resolution to all parties at the Dealing Directly stage of the process. They are encouraged to confer with the Senior Teachers Council to encourage consistency between their views on the issue and broader Buddhist wisdom.
- Ensure safety, support, and impartiality. Recuse themselves in cases where conflicts of interest exist or arise.
- Maintain confidentiality throughout the process of grievance and resolution.
- Hear grievance.
- Assist the grieving party in problem identification.
- Help the grieving party identify desired outcomes of the grievance process.
- Help the person/s whose conduct is being grieved understand and practice with the situation as appropriate.
- Propose resolutions through participation in resolution processes.
- Refer cases to the Senior Teachers Council where appropriate.
- Act as point of connection between the Senior Teachers Council and the parties in the grievance.
- Facilitate local communications about the case once it is resolved, if appropriate.
- Share resources and wisdom with the Senior Teachers Council and Kalayana Mitra at other temples, and vice versa.
- Assist in periodic review and refinement of the BSCW Ethics Policy and Grievance Process.

**Senior Teachers Council:** composed of current temple Jeolrectors, and retired Jeolrectors still active in the BSCW.

Role in the grievance process:

- Hear and review grievances brought to them.
- Propose resolutions to grievance cases through participation in resolution process.
- Share resources and wisdom with local Kalyana Mitra, and vice versa.
- Where appropriate, provide transparency to the sangha by communicating about issues raised in grievances that impact communal harmony.
- Assist in periodic review and refinement of the BSCW Ethics Policy and Grievance Process.

**Sangha Council:** the body of ordained dharma teachers and priests of the BSCW, and invited non-ordained senior sangha members.

Role in the grievance process:

- Assist the Senior Teachers Council in hearing and reviewing grievances, and proposing resolutions, when requested.
- Assist in periodic review and refinement of the BSCW Ethics Policy and Grievance Process.