

II. ETHICS POLICIES

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

Revision 120627

INTRODUCTION — POLICY CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For most practitioners of Zen, any conclusions regarding personal and social behavior drawn herein from the Ethical Conduct Guidelines will be largely self-evident, a matter of common sense and social skills. However, Sanghas often find the need arises to establish explicit policies for ethical conduct because the details of how relationships play out over time in a vibrant community can become quite complex. And there are those who join the Sangha who are ignorant of the basic Buddhist teachings, whether innocently or willfully, or are simply unwilling to abide by them. Thus, history repeatedly witnesses the development and revision of the rules of conduct (Skt. *Vinaya*; J. *Shingi*), for monastics as well as for householders.

Right conduct is manifested, and practiced, within the “three actions” of body, speech and mind. *Mind*, consisting of View and Thought (Wisdom), is not subject to direct observation by others. But actions demonstrated by body and speech are. The fact that one’s speech and action do not always match may be an indication of implicit intent, hidden agendas, or simple confusion.

In any case, it falls to the leadership, consisting of both the BOD and the AAC, to take action when necessary to preserve harmony in the Sangha. Community harmony is a cardinal value of Buddhism in general and Zen in particular. It is the purview of the BOD, working with the AAC, to establish policies governing unacceptable behavior as the need arises.

Both speech and action are widely subject to interpretation, of course. Because of this, Sangha leaders are encouraged to watch for repeat patterns of behavior over time, rather than (over)reacting to single incidents. When patterns of actions become disruptive, leadership must react.

The accompanying Resolution Procedures—Informal and Formal—are offered to structure the process of clarification, negotiation, reconciliation where possible, and final resolution of conflicts and disputes. But some behaviors within the Zen community are traditionally proscribed, while others are encouraged. Some expectations of Sangha (herein understood to mean all Clergy, Members, Residents, Students, and Guests of STO) are outlined herein, but this document is not meant to be regarded as exhaustive.

Policies endorsed by STO regarding ethical conduct within the environments and atmospheres of Affiliate Practice Centers include but are not limited to:

A. COMMITMENT TO SOTO ZEN PRACTICE

It shall be STO policy that its Sangha is committed to the promulgation and propagation of Soto Zen praxis as transmitted by founder Master Dogen and the Matsuoka, Uchiyama and Suzuki lineages. This means all Sangha members must commit to:

1. Following the Schedule

Clergy, Members and Guests—and especially Residents—of the Sangha are expected to strictly follow the schedule of Zen meditation (zazen) to the extent possible. Attendance and diligence in pursuing zazen is the hallmark of any serious Soto Zen practitioner. It is also the main way that leaders inspire and encourage other members of the Sangha, by their example.

Conversely, anyone clearly not following the schedule, appearing to avoid zazen, can become a source of confusion and consternation in the community, which may justifiably wonder why they are present. If any Clergy, Member, Guest, or Resident becomes conspicuous by their absence in the zendo, it will become a cause for concern, and their commitment to zazen will be taken into consideration in any decision made regarding any allegations about unethical conduct. It is not

acceptable to skip scheduled zazen sessions unless one has notified the Practice Leader or Ino with a legitimate reason. It is acceptable to miss zazen sessions when performing functions of service to the Sangha such as Tenzo, Innkeeper, or Leading Teacher obligations during retreat.

2. Practicing Three Minds (Sanshin)

The Three Minds of Zen are *Magnanimous Mind*, *Nurturing Mind*, and *Joyous Mind*. Because these are not necessarily the normal state of mind, it is necessary to practice them with great intention. Joyous Mind will naturally result from cultivation of the others.

Practically speaking, this means it is the obligation of the Sangha to view the behavior of others in the best possible light, giving them the benefit of the doubt, and trusting that their original Buddha Nature is untainted.

It is unacceptable to defame the character of other members of the Sangha, and any such activity will be considered a violation of the individual's compact with STO. However, it is acceptable, and possible, to discuss the behavior of others without discussing their faults. This is best taken up with the Abbess/Abbot, e.g. in private interview (*Dokusan*).

3. Taking Good Care of the Practice Place

All Sangha members are expected to assume personal responsibility for the care and upkeep of the practice place to the best of their ability. Zen inculcates a do-it-yourself mentality and mutual ownership of the environment. When and where there is a problem with the facility or grounds that is beyond one's ability to manage, it should be brought to the attention of the leadership in an appropriate manner and/or forum.

This attitude encompasses the visual impression of the interior and exterior, suggesting that clutter, litter, trash and other eyesores be removed on sight. It also means that primacy shall be given to the quiet and peaceful atmosphere conducive to Zen meditation whenever there are any members doing zazen. We support the ideal of a 24x7 open zendo policy, so that members may practice zazen at any time, day or night.

It is acceptable to make a reasonable amount of noise in the execution of one's responsibilities, even if zazen is in session and actions cannot be postponed. It is unacceptable to make unnecessary noise or to create any other kind of needless distraction, especially while zazen is in session.

B. COMMITMENT TO PRECEPTS

It shall be the policy of STO to reinforce the primacy of the Soto Zen Buddhist Precepts, the mother of which is Do No Harm. All other precepts are variations or versions of this for various contingencies. The practice of the Three Pure Precepts is the thread (sutra) running through these guidelines and policies. The third of the Pure Precepts captures the essence of Sangha practice, encouraging all to Do Good for Others. The Ten Grave Precepts relate directly to specific behaviors. Policies of STO and its Affiliates include:

1. Affirming Life

Protecting the wellbeing of all Sangha members and sentient beings within the grounds and buildings of our practice centers. We encourage practicing a healthy lifestyle, e.g. we serve vegetarian meals as our standard fare for retreats.

2. Being Giving

Fostering an atmosphere of generosity, openness and transparency with regards to assets— tangible or intangible—of Sangha and Practice Centers. We encourage perfecting the practice of dana, in the form of personal commitment, and psychological as well as material support, for the Sangha.

3. Honoring the Body

Acknowledging sexuality and other forms of treatment of the body of self and others as being subject to abuse, and that Sangha relationships are based on trust. We encourage all to strictly adhere to and respect the boundaries between individuals, especially the Teacher-Student relationship and age-appropriate discretion. Honoring the body also means honoring the mind. We encourage avoiding harassment or intimidation of any sort in inter-Sangha relationships.

4. Manifesting Truth

Inculcating a spirit of honesty and full disclosure in all transactions regarding the Sangha in the form of individuals and governing bodies, investigating the non-differentiated form of *dharma*. We encourage investigating the ultimate truth of Dharma, while perfecting the skillful means of not deceiving others.

5. Proceeding Clearly

Practicing moderation in indulgence of any and all intoxicating substances whether addictive or not. Intoxication also applies to non-substantive, mental and emotional pleasure-seeking such as pursuing fame and gain, wealth and power, as well as prestige and status within the Sangha. We encourage withdrawing from intoxication, including that of the senses and the aggregates of clinging.

6. Seeing One's Own Faults

Actualizing the magnanimous and self-reflective mindset of *buddha*, which reflects all insidious doubt and suspicion back upon the self. We encourage seeing what is good about other Sangha members, and to regard any negative behavior as a symptom of their personal form of suffering.

7. Treating Self and Other as One

Manifesting the nurturing and forgiving mindset of *sangha*, the true family that finds its provenance in the original Order. We encourage saying what is good about other Sangha members, refraining from harsh or undue criticism. While we recognize unique differences between us we remember the dictum that "the most we can say is not-two."

8. Sharing Generously

Recognizing that begrudging is the antithesis of sharing, the Dharma assets include presence, information, and merit that is immaculate between the giver and receiver, as well as material goods and services. We encourage sharing generously that which others give and receive freely and willingly. Finding resistance, we are under no obligation to share; they are under no obligation to receive.

9. Actualizing Harmony

Eradicating the three poisons of clinging/greed, anger/hatred and infatuation/delusion from the presence we bring to the Sangha. We encourage drinking deeply from the well of the community, and we should do everything in our power to avoid poisoning it. Its waters may be flavorless, but they are the life-blood of Buddhism.

10. Knowing Intimacy with All Things

Embracing the intimacy without defilement that is dropping off bodymind without relying on anything. When Buddha, Dharma and Sangha all come together in a unified way, this is the true and simple color of true practice, of the true mind of faith; of the true body of faith. We encourage entering into, accepting and maintaining Sangha practice, without relying on it.