

V. INFORMAL RESOLUTION

SILENT THUNDER ORDER

Revision 120627

INTRODUCTION

Although no fixed procedures for informal conflict resolution exist, the suggestions and procedures that follow are intended to give all persons involved in a dispute a chance to be fully heard, in an atmosphere of respect and kindness that reaffirms that our differences are not fundamental. However, if informal resolution is not possible, formal resolution to the difficulty should be sought.

A. Stating the Actual

A crucial aspect of conflict resolution, as in Buddhist practice itself, is discriminating between interpretations and opinions of an event, and how the event is personally experienced. In part, this means not making general statements, but rather sticking to the particulars of actual situations, and the emotions experienced. It is extremely difficult to have mutual understanding, when discussion remains at the level of interpretation and generalization.

B. Being Heard

It is important that everyone be given an opportunity to be fully heard. This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of a conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Such statements should be neither defensive nor critical, since both approaches tend to preclude deeper mutual understanding. Much conflict arises and is perpetuated through a lack of mutual understanding. Taking calm, deliberate, and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for resolution.

C. Restating What Was Heard

To insure that everyone understands one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said, highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate, and makes corrections.

D. Confession

Resolution and reconciliation is greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how they may have contributed to a conflict, and then explains this to the other party. Even when one person is primarily responsible, self-reflection, confession, and apology on everyone's part can provide a safer, more trusting, and understanding atmosphere for everyone to be truthful.

E. Facilitation

It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or mediators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness, providing a sense of calm and presence, or may be an active mediator, who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunities to speak. This person might also point out the difference between statements of opinion and interpretation, and direct statements of how an event or feeling is actually experienced. Invited facilitators can be anyone whom both parties respect; e.g., friends, neutral acquaintances, practice leaders, directors, members of the BOD or AAC, or people within or outside the Sangha who are trained in mediation.

F. Seeking Advice

In addition to or instead of inviting a facilitator to participate, it can be useful to seek advice for working informally with a conflict. Such advice can be received from friends, practice leaders and members of the BOD and AAC.

