

I. Sangha

A. Ethics Policy

1. Commitment to Study and Practice

More than a set of rules, ethics involves a commitment to collective and individual study and practice of the precepts, including a commitment to finding wise ways to work with conflict..

Here are the precepts as expressed in our sutra book:

2. Commandments of the Seven Buddhas

I shall not cause harm of any kind
I shall live in and be a servant to all that is good
I shall cultivate the purity that is our nature.
This is the full teaching of the awakened ones.

3. The Ten Precepts

I will be reverential and mindful with all life; I will not kill or be ruled by violence.

I will respect others' property; I will not steal.

I will be conscious and loving in my relationships; I will not be ruled by lust.

I will honor honesty and truth; I will not deceive.

I will exercise proper care of my body and mind; I will not be gluttonous or abuse intoxicants.

I will remember that silence is precious; I will not gossip or engage in frivolous conversation.

I will be humble; I will not exalt myself or judge others.

I will be grateful for my life; I will not covet or be directed by envy or jealousy.

I will keep my mind at peace; I will not be directed by anger.

I will esteem the three treasures, the Buddha Dharma, and Sangha.

4. The Eightfold Path also serves as a guide:

Right Understanding
Right Thought
Right Speech
Right Action
Right Livelihood
Right Effort
Right Mindfulness
Right Contemplation

5. When Difficulties Arise

The intention to attend to and learn from conflict is a clear application of Buddhist practice into our daily lives; without this intention, practice can too easily be a comfort rather than a deep transformative vehicle for our lives. The health of our sangha is measured by our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving interpersonal tensions as they arise.

Buddhist conflict resolution is 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 his/her own direct experiences and feelings. In looking for resolution, Buddhist practice values dialogue over isolation, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, confession over accusation, and atonement over punishment.

Chobo-Ji recognizes that the functioning of the group depends on providing a safe and non-threatening environment in which to practice. Chobo-Ji also recognizes that at times Zen practice can feel quite unsafe and threatening. Although Buddhist conflict resolution provides understanding and compassion for all thoughts, emotions and behaviors, it is recognized that certain behaviors will not be allowed as they significantly impact safety and harmony. Please see sections 7 and 8 below.

We also recognize that sometimes Sangha members have interpersonal clashes that result in disharmony, even if there has been no ethical breach. The reconciliation policy is intended as a structure to allow for resolution of such conflicts within the sangha as well as for the investigation of potential ethical breaches.

6. Reconciliation Policy

Chobo-Ji is a community based on trust and respect. All Sangha members are expected to interact with one another in a manner that reflects caring respect and are expected to behave in an ethical manner flowing from the Precepts.

If a community member has concerns about how s/he is being treated by another member of the community or if s/he has concerns about another member's ethical conduct within the community, s/he is encouraged to have a direct conversation with that person to address these concerns, provide feedback and reach agreement about needed changes.

However, if the concerned Sangha member does not feel safe to speak directly with the source of his/her concern, or if speaking with that person did not resolve the concern, s/he is encouraged to follow the reconciliation process, as discussed below.

The Chobo-Ji board selects at least three members to oversee a process to hear and resolve issues of interpersonal behavior and/or ethics. Anyone having such concerns will be directed to this committee. As of February 1, 2012, Ethics and Reconciliation Committee (“committee”) members are: Seishun Dee Endelman, Isshin Scott Stolnack, Muka Linda Wehnes and Shinke Peter Ilginfritz. This Committee will meet at least quarterly.

For any situation concerning a potential ethical breach by an ordained member of the community, the policy of the Chobo-ji board is to refer to an outside group (for example, the Faith Trust Institute or a similar organization with expertise on the matters in question). An individual with concerns regarding such a breach should talk to a member of the committee to begin this process. If the individual feels uncomfortable using this process, or after having contacted the committee, believes that the process is not working, he or she also has the option of speaking with any Board member.

After an individual brings a concern to a committee member or members, the member(s) will determine from the given information how to proceed. In general, it is anticipated that most concerns will start with the committee member(s) gathering details, informing the Abbott and consulting with each other on the proper course of action. Courses of action may include a reconciliation meeting, consultation with the abbot, outside arbitration, individual consultation, or individual recommendations and/or requirements of action. The preferred method of resolution is a reconciliation meeting, and the committee will strive to resolve all issues in this manner when appropriate. The resolution meeting steps are as follows.

6.1 Step One.

The person bringing the concern will request a meeting with the source of his/her concern with a member or members of the committee present. The purpose of this meeting is to talk through the concerns in a facilitated setting.

6.2 Step Two.

If this step does not resolve the matter or if the person bringing the concern does not want an informal meeting, s/he will put the concerns/complaint in writing for the committee or may meet in person with at least two committee members to review the concern. The committee members can then assist the person in writing up the concern.

6.2.1 a. The written statement of concern may be brief, but it should include the name(s) and a description of the problematic behavior, the context and the concerned person's feelings.

6.2.2 b. This written statement and all conversations associated with the concern will be treated as confidential throughout this process.

6.3 There may be several outcomes from this meeting:

6.3.1 By mutual agreement, the concerned person and the committee may decide on an informal way to reconcile matters between the parties such as a facilitated meeting; or

6.3.2 The committee may engage in further inquiry, first notifying the individual about whom the concern was raised and giving them an opportunity to respond to the concern.

6.3.3 If the committee believes that a serious breach of interpersonal behavior or a serious breach of ethics may have occurred, it will engage in an investigation. In this case, the individual about whom the concern is raised will be notified and given an opportunity for response. The full Board will also be notified that an investigation will be conducted. In some instances, an outside group may be asked to help with this;

6.3.4 If the committee determines that any Chobo-Ji visitor or member threatens the safety of Chobo-Ji or its members, it may recommend removal from the community to the Chobo-Ji board. The Abbott can also temporarily remove a visitor or member if he believes that this person is a treat to safety. The Abbott will consult with the Board before permanently banning any member.

7. Potential Consequences of Ethical Breach

There will be consequences for a determined breach of ethics. These will vary, of course, depending on the nature and severity but may include anything up to legal action or expulsion from the Sangha.

8. Specific Ethical Statements

It is not feasible to have a policy regarding every potential ethical issue. Nevertheless, the Board believes it is important to make our statement of ethics clear in the following matters where breeches have created much suffering in religious communities.

9. Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is a matter of particular concern to a religious community in which students and teachers are connected by strong bonds of spiritual interdependence and trust. Everyone who comes to Chobo-Ji in any capacity has the right to be free from sexual harassment. Sexual harassment can consist of

unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature which is unwelcome. Continued expression of sexual interest directed at another Chobo-Ji member or visitor to Chobo-Ji, after being informed that such interest is unwelcome, or in a manner that is offensive, is a misuse of sexuality. The expression of sexual or romantic interest in new Chobo-Ji members or visitors may be particularly problematic and is inconsistent with Chobo-Ji's philosophy of creating a supportive and welcoming environment. Chobo-Ji members should therefore be especially sensitive to visitors and new members and to their need for a safe, nurturing spiritual environment.

10. Confidentiality

Students at Chobo-Ji should feel that they can fully practice the Dharma and study the self in an environment of trust. Chobo-Ji teachers shall not disclose information that they receive in Dokusan or one-to-one practice meetings. There is one area of exception: Clergy are legally bound to report abuse of a child or threatened physical harm to anyone.

The confidential relationship between student and teacher must never become a means for imposing silence in situations where harm is being done. Should such a harmful situation arise, the student should feel free to speak to the appropriate individual – either to the teacher directly, if possible, to a sangha friend, and/or to the Reconciliation Committee.

11. Non-Discrimination Policy

Chobo-Ji is committed to promoting and maintaining an open and diverse community. Any disrespectful, discriminatory, or preferential treatment of others on the basis of race, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, age, disability, income, ethnicity, or national origin is a violation of the Chobo-Ji ethical guidelines.

12. Student-Teacher Relationship

The following quote from Sex and the Spiritual Teacher sums up the Chobo-Ji Board's thoughts about the mutual responsibilities involved in the student-teacher relationship:

“At the center of every healthy teacher-student relationship are several implicit agreements:

- The student hopes to become wiser, more aware, more loving and/or more fully human.
- The teacher commits to helping the student in this endeavor and to acting in the student's best interests at all times. This includes not harming or exploiting the students in any way. (It may, however, sometimes involve telling the student some difficult or painful truths or, in services of something greater, sometimes doing the opposite of what the student hopes for or expects).
- The student trusts that the teacher will honor these commitments.

- The student also agrees not to exploit the teacher for their own emotional, sexual or financial gain.”

We expect both teachers and students to work within the container of these agreements.

13. Positions of Trust

The Chobo-Ji community expresses its special trust in certain individuals in the positions of teachers, priests, directors, officers, and holders of posts. Exploiting relationships, harming others, or abusing influence breaches this trust, especially when such misconduct occurs under the pretense of teaching methods or Zen practice. Examples of misconduct include, but are not limited to, physical violence, misappropriation of community funds, breach of confidences, and sexual relations between a teacher and student. Misconduct by those in positions of trust can significantly undermine the integrity of the community.