

Chobo-Ji Conflict Resolution and Ethics Policies

(2019 Revision Draft 5)

I. Introduction and Road Map of Contents

In these pages are laid out two policies that seek to meet two distinct needs of our Chobo-Ji community. The first, Restorative Processes, is for processes that can help us work through and resolve the many interpersonal tensions, misunderstandings, and conflicts that arise in the normal course of our life as a Rinzai Zen sangha. The second, an Ethics Policy, is for policies and procedures to guide us in the case of ethical violations. These violations are not part of our normal lives together, but we must be ready to deal with them when they occur. The document's final section reminds us of four foundational sets of vows that are core to our Buddhist spiritual and moral practice and must underly both policies, as they are written, and much more importantly, as we carry them out.

Overseeing and guiding us with Restorative Processes is Chobo-Ji's Restorative Processes Council, a group of sangha members appointed by the Board of Trustees, with the Abbot as an ex officio member. Overseeing the administration of the Ethics Policy, and responsible for appointing ad hoc Ethics Panels to carry out investigations of possible ethical violations, is the Chobo-Ji Board of Trustees.

The following outline is a road map to help the reader navigate the rest of the document.

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II. Restorative Processes: Resolving Interpersonal Distress and Conflict

Conflict happens often. Attending to and learning from it is a clear application of Buddhist practices in our daily lives. Without this intention, practice can too easily be a comfort rather than a deep transformative vehicle. The health of our sangha depends on our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving interpersonal tensions as they arise.

Buddhist conflict resolution focuses on fully addressing the suffering of all concerned. We take hurt, fear, and anger seriously, and in responding to these feelings, our practice is fundamentally guided by kindness. Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. We value dialogue and careful listening over isolation. We foster curiosity, mutual understanding and acceptance. We encourage connection, compassion, clarity and forgiveness (of both self and other) rather than holding resentment and blame. We value atonement over punishment. Acting on these values, we aim to provide the means and support for people to speak honestly, safely, and completely about their own direct experiences, feelings and needs.

Chobo-Ji recognizes that the functioning of the group depends on providing a safe, non-threatening, and caring environment in which to practice. Chobo-Ji also recognizes that at times Zen practice, as we let go of ego defenses, can feel quite unsafe and threatening. This is especially likely to happen as emotions are rubbed raw during the rigors of sesshins, but it also occurs because of the inevitable tensions, irritations, and misunderstandings that arise among members of a small, often intense, community. For these reasons we have developed the specific procedures outlined below.

A. Distress arises, a concern develops

One person feels bumped in some way by another person, and may experience uneasiness, confusion, tension, frustration, or anger. A person may feel insensitively or unfairly treated by another. A person may feel recurrently put down, disregarded, misunderstood. A person may feel his or her boundaries (cultural, psychological or physical) have not been understood or observed. A person may experience another's speech (oral or written) as angry, insulting, disruptive, or in some other way inappropriate. Someone may hear that someone else in the sangha has been gossiping about them, and feel hurt by this. Someone may share something which the listener would rather not know or hear, and hasn't respected a request to stop or drop the subject. An unresolved disagreement may have led to ongoing tension. These are some of the specific forms inter-

personal distress may take; some of them overlap, and the list is not exhaustive. Finally, any of these forms of interpersonal distress may involve interactions affected by power imbalances which make the experience more fraught: for example, between more senior sangha members and newer members or attenders, between white people and people of color, between men and women, between cis-gendered and transgendered, between people with different sexual orientations, between people with disabilities and those without disabilities, between the abbot and unsui. Any of us may feel bumped, and any of us may – though most likely unintentionally – do the bumping.

B. Restorative processes and procedures for resolving concerns

A sangha member experiencing distress may wish to take the following steps as a sequence, may find that one or more of the first three steps suffice, or at any point may wish to move to step 4, seeking assistance from the Restorative Processes Council.

1. Sit with the distress.

Sitting with our perceptions and feelings can be very helpful. Investigate within, determine to what extent our own minds are creating the distress, and see whether we can resolve it internally. Try self-empathy and empathy for the other person or people involved.

2. Speak with an empathetic listener.

Turn to someone whose empathetic listening may help you sort out your feelings about what has occurred. This person may be the Abbot or Osho who is leading a sesshin, a member of the Restorative Processes Council, someone else designated as an experienced listener available during a sesshin, or a trusted friend.

3. Speak directly with the other person involved.

If you feel able to do so, after sitting with the distress, and perhaps after being heard by an empathetic listener, speak directly with the other person involved. Request a conversation, communicate what has happened, share your experience of it, listen to their perceptions and experience, and together aim for clarity, mutual understanding, and connection.

4. Request a facilitated conversation.

This resource is available to help a sangha member with a concern bring that concern to the other person involved, and to provide a structure of kindness within which both people can feel supported in finding ways to talk about what has happened, how each perceives it and feels about it, and how they can arrive at a mutual understanding and resolution. The process may initially look dauntingly formal and cumbersome, but it is designed to create an assurance of safety as well as flow and ease. The process consists of the following steps:

- a. The sangha member with the concern (the “author”) approaches a representative of the Restorative Processes Council (RPC) for assistance in setting up a conversation. In consultation with the author, the RPC will appoint a facilitator, a member of the Council or someone else the RPC names. The facilitator will begin by talking with the author to gain a preliminary understanding of the circumstances giving rise to the concern. The facilitator will focus on empathetic listening, helping the author feel heard and understood, and refraining from making judgments of right and wrong.

- b. The facilitator will then, as soon as possible, gently approach the other person involved (the “recipient”) , letting them know that the author has expressed a concern and invites a facilitated conversation. The facilitator will summarize the concern, and will talk with the recipient just as they have with the author. The facilitator will give the recipient an opportunity to express how he/she recalls the situation, and also how she/he is feeling about being approached in this way and being invited to participate in a facilitated conversation. Again, the facilitator will focus on empathetic listening, helping the recipient feel heard and understood, and refraining from making judgments. The facilitator will also make it clear to the recipient that meeting with the author is not compulsory, that they are free to say no, and that the process is confidential.

- c. In each of these preliminary conversations, the facilitator will explain the process; its assurance of confidentiality; its goals of openness, clarity, mutual understanding, and harmony; and the facilitator’s own role as a caring but neutral guide. The facilitator will also offer each party the opportunity to choose a support person to be present during the conversation. This support person may be whomever they wish: a friend, family member, counselor, whomever. If either requests suggestions of possible support people, the facilitator will suggest members of the RPC and will assist in contacting someone. Once these decisions have been made, the facilitator will find a time in the very near future (within a week if at all possible) that is agreeable to all, and a suitable meeting place. The facilitator will continue to inform both parties about the timeline, and if

a delay occurs for any reason, the facilitator will inform both parties about the reasons for the delay.

d. If the facilitator sees the need for further checking-out of any kind, for example speaking with third parties, they will notify the author and recipient immediately, explaining the particulars and requesting permission. The facilitator will make these inquiries. The facilitator may also wish to consult with members of the RPC for advice and support; if the facilitator does this, she/he will inform author and recipient that this is happening, and that Council members consulted will also maintain confidentiality.

e. The conversation: the facilitator will outline the process, then invite each party, beginning with the author, to take time to say what occurred and what feelings arose for them at that time. While speaking, the author will try to avoid drawing conclusions about the recipient's motives, and the recipient will be asked to listen, without interrupting, as empathetically (without judging) and deeply as they are able. Then, after a pause, the recipient will be asked to give their view of what occurred and relate their motives at the time of the event(s), while the author listens without interrupting, empathetically and deeply. Each speaker will be encouraged to pause at any point for reflection, if they need to, before continuing to speak, and each listener may ask for a pause at any point to reflect or digest what has been shared. When both speakers have finished, if need be, the facilitator will help the dialogue to continue by inviting each to say how they have understood the other, to ask questions seeking greater clarity, and to say what they hope for going forward.

f. If the recipient has not been willing to meet with the author, the facilitator should, in consultation with the RPC, give the author an opportunity to engage in a facilitated dialogue with another Council member who can support the author in processing her or his experience. Afterwards, the facilitator will inform the recipient in more detail about the concern, and ask for some kind of response to the concern, even if that response is an unwillingness to respond further.

C. Guidelines for the Restorative Processes Council

This group is charged with overseeing the sangha's reconciliation processes and promoting open and kind communication among us. Appointed by the Board of Trustees, it is composed of three sangha members. It may also draw on a pool of others with long sangha experience, sangha members – among them persons trained in Nonviolent Communication and/or others with long sangha experience or particular expertise. And it may invite guests from outside the sangha to help with particular situations.

Council members are responsible for:

1. Being available to offer guidance, empathy, understanding, and emotional resources to sangha members expressing concerns.
2. Helping to assure that responses to concerns are both timely and kind to all parties, bearing in mind that it can take some courage to raise a concern, and that the recipient of a concern may, especially initially, feel some anxiety, fear, and confusion.
3. Choosing a facilitator when someone requests a facilitated conversation, and being available to serve as facilitators. The Abbot will normally not serve as a facilitator, even though he will often have been the first person with whom someone with a concern has spoken. Also, if a concern is in regards to a member of the RPC or to a member's spouse or romantic partner, that member should step aside from involvement.)
4. Offering support to facilitators when needed.
5. Being ready to raise concerns themselves, when they observe problems arising from a sangha member's speech or actions.
6. Informing the Chobo-Ji Board President and Abbot if (unusually) a concern may involve a possible ethical violation (see the Ethics Policy outlined in Part III of this document). The RPC should inform both author and recipient that this is happening.
7. When one incident triggers another, or when multiple concerns arise close together regarding the same recipient, discerning whether to arrange for separate processes to work with each concern. And in such cases, the Abbot, if not already aware of the situation, will be informed.
8. Being ready to call in consultants from outside the sangha when in need of expertise not currently represented in the sangha (for example experience working with white privilege / people of color interactions).
9. Continuing to educate themselves in Nonviolent Communication and in particular issues that can affect relationships within diverse communities, such as white privilege and sexism. This is also a responsibility for everyone in the sangha.
10. Meeting to review how the listening and reconciliation processes are working.

11. Continuing to review and revise this document, proposing changes to the Board as we gain experience with reconciliation processes and as conditions change.

III. Ethics Policy: Investigating Possible Ethical Violations

“Ethical violations” refers to conduct which causes serious harm to individuals or to the community. They are rare. They are clearly of a different order of magnitude from the potentially distressing behaviors that occur frequently in our interpersonal relationships (and that are addressed in section II of this document). Potential ethical violations thus require a careful investigative process. In some instances they will also require immediate action, such as temporarily suspending someone from a position of power, or intervening specifically to stop behavior that is deemed dangerous or harmful.

Ethical violations can be actions that are illegal and may require legal action, such as theft. Or an ethical violation can be unethical conduct, such as bullying, that impacts the safety of individuals and undermines trust. Even when not punishable by law, unethical conduct cannot be permitted to recur. Thus complaints of ethical violations require careful investigation. This process is quite different from the restorative processes described in section II. It is crucial, however, that kindness and fairness to all parties guide our investigative processes as they do our restorative processes.

A. Examples of Ethical Violations

1. Misuse of community funds. Unless contracted by the board of Chobo-Ji for services deserving payment, no funds from Chobo-Ji shall be used for personal gain.

2. Acting in direct contradiction to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees is the governing body that has been selected to direct and oversee the management of the temple and care for the sangha. Consequently, the board sets guidelines and sometimes gives specific directions regarding behavior, policy and financial expenditures. If someone knowingly acts in direct contradiction to the Board of Trustees, this is an ethical violation.

3. Discrimination by the sangha or persons of power. No person shall be discriminated against for any reason, including race, gender, gender-identity, sexual preference, age, disability, etc.

4. Sexual harassment. Sexual harassment consists of unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, or physical conduct of a sexual nature that is unwelcome. Con-

tinued verbal expression of sexual interest, after someone says that such interest is unwelcome, is a misuse of sexuality and an ethical violation. Because of the inherent power differential between priests and lay members, it is inappropriate for a priest to make any expression of sexual interest to another sangha member for the purpose of furthering or deepening a relationship, satisfying his or her own sexual needs, or arousing sexual interest.

We acknowledge that people's tolerance for and understanding of what constitutes sexual expression varies. Confusion is bound to arise. A hug or hand on the shoulder may be benign to one but not to another. Requests not to be touched must be respected. In the context of deep spiritual practice, sometimes sexual energy arises. Confusion about one's own sexuality may emerge. Mature discussion between two people may be appropriate and even necessary. However, continued talk about one's confusion/attraction may not be welcomed and should stop whenever the other person asks that it stop.

The line between what constitutes mature sexual talk and sexually inappropriate speech hinges on mutual consent and intent. Mature sexual talk supports learning and growth. However, if the talk of sex is titillating or arousing and is taking place between people where a power differential exists, then it is most likely inappropriate. The sexual talk should stop if someone explicitly states that they do not want to hear sexual talk, mature or not, or if they appear uneasy, and the conversation is taking place in a one-on-one setting.

Sometimes public statements are made that are not intended to arouse and titillate but to acknowledge human sexual complexity as well as potential sexual wounding. For example, in public discussions of the precept on sexuality, it is impossible to have a mature and frank discussion without talking about sex. These public statements may be uncomfortable to some, but if they are not meant to arouse or titillate but to teach and inform, they are not regarded as sexual harassment. A person who is uncomfortable should care for himself or herself by leaving the setting and/or seeking guidance from a representative of the RPC.

Teachers must never have sex with their students or seek to have their sexual needs gratified by a student: these actions are clearly ethical violations.

5. Other examples of behaviors that may constitute ethical violations: the use of physical violence, abusive language, bullying, and the unjust use of people for personal advantage (for example taking advantage of someone's willingness to train for personal advantage, or lying or speaking ill of others for personal gain).

B. Gray areas

With regard to many types of behavior within which ethical violations may arise, there will be a wide range of behaviors. At one extreme, such as physical or sexual violence, a behavior requires police involvement. At another extreme, a particular behavior might be seen as a minor error of judgment or over-impulsiveness, which can be responded to with restorative processes. And in the middle there will be gray areas requiring deep discernment on the part of investigators.

Complaints involving boundary violations may be particularly likely to fall into these gray areas. “Boundaries” describe the physical, psychological, and cultural limits that help us differentiate from one another and prescribe appropriate behaviors for people in given roles. With healthy boundaries, we recognize another person’s internal subjective experience, accept their separate needs and expectations, and act appropriately. Boundary violations are, to some degree, inevitable. We mistakenly cross boundaries all the time (for instance, by saying something that stimulates someone feeling hurt, cutting someone off in communication, disclosing more to someone than they want to hear, speaking in ignorance or forgetfulness of a cultural sensitivity). For the most part, these boundary violations can be addressed by the people involved, and the concerns they lead to should be addressed by the restorative process procedures described in Section II.

Ethical violations are boundary violations which, in general, are not accidental but prioritize personal gratification at the expense of someone else’s well being. Clear examples are theft of property, misuse of community funds, non-consensual sexual touch or communication, lying for personal gain, or other similar violations that have a substantial negative impact on one or more sangha members.

C. Dual relationships and potential problems

The term “dual relationship” denotes more than one kind of relationship existing between the same two people. For example, if someone is both your friend and your business partner this is one kind of dual relationship. Dual relationships in and of themselves are not boundary violations nor do they necessarily violate ethical standards, but they do present potential dilemmas when a power differential is involved. For instance, a spiritual teacher, sensei or priest often meets a sangha member’s core needs through spiritual guidance. If the teacher, sensei or priest in turn hopes to get his or her own core needs met (for companionship, friendship, love, touch, understanding), the situation is rife with the potential for misunderstanding, hurt feelings and conflict. Hurt feel-

ings and conflict are normal parts of human interaction, but they are especially potent between student and teacher. The student trusts the teacher to help guide her or his spiritual life and thus trusts the teacher to put the student's needs above the teacher's own. Indeed, the teacher is asked to protect the student from the teacher's own core needs. Thus for the most part, when there is this kind of clear power differential, dual relationships should be avoided. This is not to say, however, that when a teacher goes to coffee and enjoys a certain level of friendship with a sangha member, this is an ethical violation. Dual relationships become unethical only when the teacher, in this instance, gains at the expense of the student. So this is another example of a gray area requiring deep discernment and community wisdom.

D. Procedure for the investigation of a possible ethical violation

What follows is an outline of investigative steps to be taken in response to a complaint about a possible ethical violation. These steps are to be taken by the Chobo-Ji Board of Trustees and an ad hoc Ethics Panel. Members of both groups will endeavor to treat all affected parties with care and compassion and open-mindedness. They will be patient with parties who may understandably feel deeply upset by what is happening. They will act with sensitivity to any power imbalances inherent in the particular situation (such as the relations between student and teacher, people of color and white people, men and women, cis-gendered and transgendered people, people with different sexual orientations, people with disabilities and those without disabilities, abbot and unsui). They will act expeditiously, they will maintain confidences, and they will keep the parties informed about what is happening. Board members who have conflicts of interest in regard to any of the parties in the complaint should not participate in any part of this process.

1. Someone makes an ethical complaint

A person may make a direct ethical complaint to any member of the board or to the abbot. The board member or abbot must then bring the ethical complaint to the board's executive committee for consideration of its merits. The person making the complaint need not be the aggrieved party. For instance, if one were to become aware of inappropriate sexual relationships between a teacher and student, the student need not be the complainant. Also, someone engaged in a restorative processes procedure may at any time make a complaint to the board, or any member of the Restorative Processes Council may make that complaint. Any board member or the abbot may also make the complaint.

2. The Executive Committee of the Board of Trustees receives the complaint and determines whether it is a possible ethical violation warranting investigation.

This will happen in several steps:

a. First, the board member who receives the complaint will forward it immediately to the board president. The president will draw together the executive committee of the board (all available board officers, the abbot, and the past president, excluding of course any the complaint is about) to consider the merits of the complaint. This should take place within 72 hours of the complaint. If a meeting cannot occur within that time, the earliest possible date must be scheduled and that date must be made known to all members affected by the complaint. (Because of the potentially extreme nature of an ethical complaint and because of the possible risk to the safety of the sangha, when an ethical complaint is made, the executive committee should treat it as one would an emergency.)

b. In determining whether or not the complaint warrants investigation, among the questions the executive committee should ask are: If the behavior alleged by the complainant did occur, would it actually constitute an ethical violation? If it is possible that the complaint arises from one person's confusion about or misinterpretation of another's behavior, what if any efforts have already been made to resolve the problem? Someone on the executive committee should talk with both parties (or all parties if more than two are involved) to try to get as clear a sense of the situation as is possible at this stage. Both the complainant and the person about whom the complaint is made should be given the opportunity to submit a written statement. These things should be done right away. If the executive committee at this stage determines that there is a reasonable possibility that a crime legally requiring police or social work intervention may have been committed, appropriate authorities should be notified.

c. If the executive committee determines that the complaint does not constitute an ethical violation, the parties should be informed, and they should be asked to address the concern with the help of the Restorative Processes Council. If the executive committee determines that the complaint requires immediate action to stop behavior deemed dangerous or harmful, they are empowered to take this action at once. If the complaint warrants investigation, they should inform both parties and call a meeting of the full board. The full board will then (1) determine whether any additional actions are needed (such as temporarily suspending someone from a position of power) and (2) form an ad hoc Ethics Panel to carry out an investigation.

3. The board appoints an Ethics Panel to carry out an investigation.

If a meeting of the full board is called, it should take place within a week of the initial complaint. Ideally it will include all members of the board, and board members who can't attend in person will be invited to attend electronically. If the meeting cannot occur within a week, it must be scheduled as soon as possible.

At this meeting, after deciding whether any additional action is needed (see 2.c above), the board will form an ad hoc Ethics Panel made up of at least three people with some level of expertise and experience in the matter of ethics and healthy boundaries and other issues relevant to the particular complaint. Generally, these people will be sangha members, but the board could include someone from outside the sangha if they think this is desirable in a specific situation. Panel members should not have any conflicts of interest with anyone involved in the investigation.

If an osho, teacher, or sensei (in the position of a teacher in the situation giving rise to the complaint) is being investigated, the Ethics Panel may be formed differently. So that students will not have to investigate their own teacher, the board could instruct its executive committee to appoint or hire a contingent of at least three individuals from outside the immediate sangha, well-versed in ethics, having a level of expertise in the area of concern, ideally having some Zen training, and able to begin work right away.

The board will also designate a member (usually the board president) to be a consultant to the panel. She or he will not sit with the panel or participate in the investigation, but will answer any questions the panel (especially if it is made up of persons outside the sangha) have about Zen practice and other aspects of life at Chobo-Ji. The panel may also ask the consultant for practical information, such as how to contact a particular person. Throughout the investigation, the panel will keep the board consultant informed about its activities and progress.

4. The Ethics Panel carries out an investigation.

The panel will immediately begin to gather information, with tasks assigned to each member of the panel. The panel will aim to complete this process within two weeks. Information can be gathered in any order. If needed information cannot be obtained within two weeks, a clear deadline should be set, with the whole information-gathering process occupying no more than four weeks. (Material not gathered within four weeks

will be deemed irrelevant to the current investigation; if a piece of information is brought forth at a later date, a new complaint or appeal can be filed.)

All parties to the complaint should be heard right away. One panel member will be assigned to each person in the complaint, and will hear and relay that person's viewpoint to the full panel. These point persons will be the empathetic ear to the person to whom they are assigned and will be a continuing liaison to the full ethics panel. Another panel member will serve as facilitator for the whole process. (The facilitator of the panel may not also serve as a point person to one of the parties.) Each party will be separately interviewed and asked for a written statement. Each should be approached with kindness and open-mindedness and should feel he or she has been fully and objectively heard. The parties should be further interviewed if more questions arise. The parties may also submit additional information, either orally or in writing, after their initial interview and statement. Throughout the process, the point persons will keep the parties informed about the nature of the process, will respond to their questions, will inform them if others are being interviewed and/or asked for statements, and will continue to check to make sure each feels heard.

Each party should also be told he or she may, if they wish, choose a support person to be present with them during interviews, and to assist them to communicate clearly, observe, and ask questions.

The panel's facilitator should also keep open a line of communication with the board member designated as a consultant to the panel, making regular reports and if needed requesting information (see the final paragraph of #3, above).

Finally, the panel and also the parties should keep written timelines of the investigation: what steps are taken, and when.

5. The Ethics Panel makes a report to the board.

Within a month of its formation, the Ethics Panel will prepare a written report. The report should organize, summarize and assess the information gathered, in accordance with, though not limited to, the ethics policies articulated earlier in this document. Its chief task is to make observations and recommend a course of action for the restoration of sangha harmony and safety.

In making its report the panel will, while striving for transparency, respect the sensitive nature of information and exercise prudence in terms of sharing with the board the con-

tent of personal communications. With everyone else, it will maintain strict confidentiality.

6. The board considers the Ethics Panel's report, seeks more information if needed, establishes a finding, and takes appropriate actions.

a. After receiving the panel's report, the board will consider the information and recommendations. It may request clarifications from the panel and either ask the panel for more information or seek additional information for itself. After all this has been completed, it should establish a finding. It should notify the parties and the Ethics Panel of its decision.

b. If the board finds that an ethical violation has been committed, it has the power and responsibility to remove people from positions of power, order departure from the sangha, request psychological counseling, request restitution, or take other action that it deems appropriate to ensure the safety and health of the sangha. When considering remedies less severe than expulsion, the board should work with the offending party to find a clear and equitable path towards (1) reconciliation, if at all possible, with the offended parties; (2) restitution if needed, and/or (3) rehabilitation.

7. An appeals process may be requested.

If either the complainant or the person complained about thinks the board is mistaken in its final determinations, they may submit to the board president, in written form, an appeal. This appeal should offer further evidence or reasoning for the request that the board reconsider its conclusion. This should be done within two weeks of their being notified of the board's determinations. The executive committee will then meet to consider the merit of the appeal. It will determine, preferably within 72 hours, if the appeal will be heard by the full board. If so, the same investigative process will be carried out as described above, now by the board, limiting all discussion and deliberation to the new information or new reasoning which warranted reconsideration.

Reconsideration of the outcome of an ethical investigation should not be based on concerns about hurt feelings, misunderstandings, or wanting to make all parties happy. It should incorporate perspectives or information not included in the original investigation. If the appeal is rejected, further interpersonal work should be redirected to the Restorative Processes Council. Indeed, whatever the outcome of an ethical investigation may be, restorative processes should be used to help create peace and mutual understanding, if at all possible.

IV. Buddhist Ethics – Principles of Sangha Life

In *Taking Our Places* (2003), Norman Fischer says, “Living an ethical life is not a simple matter. In addition to some understanding of the foundations of morality, living ethically takes a degree of courage and awareness that few of us have taken the time to develop. Have we considered ethical conduct as an active, thoughtful, challenging, and ongoing practice?”

The processes and policies outlined in this document grow out of the Chobo-Ji Sangha’s commitment to this practice. In it we build on the foundation of the rich Buddhist ethical heritage represented in our Sutra Books by the challenging and inspiring words of the Four Great Vows, the Commandments of the Seven Buddhas, The Ten Precepts, and the Noble Eightfold Path. They underlie our commitment to finding wise ways to work with conflict.

Four Great Vows

However innumerable all beings are, we vow to care for them all.
However inexhaustible delusions are, we vow to relinquish them all.
However immeasurable gates to truth are, we vow to enter them all.
However endless the Buddha’s way is, we vow to follow it.

The first of these vows is the Great Vow, from which the others stem.

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.

These are compass points of our practice, intended to keep us on a path of care for our sangha and fellow beings and our earth. When confused or reactive, we can look back toward the Commandments of the Seven Buddhas and use them to assess our direction. Does my action/speech cause harm? Is it in the service of doing good? With it, am I cultivating the purity that is my nature?

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.

This is the map which helps us navigate our lives. Most of the time, we can travel without a map, but when confused or reactive, going back to the map is helpful. We can use these precepts both as tools for assessment and as mindfulness practices. If we carry them as companions in our heart-mind, we are much less likely to falter and hurt ourselves or others.

The Eightfold Path

Attuned Understanding

Attuned Thought

Attuned Speech

Attuned Action

Attuned Livelihood

Attuned Effort

Attuned Mindfulness

Attuned Contemplation

This ancient and profound guide to living was one of the earliest expressions of Shakyamuni Buddha's awakening. It remains fresh today, directing us to maintain the mindful state of a clear and ethical life, and offering tools for assessment, direction and mindfulness practice.

In conclusion, let us remember that this document is a work in progress and will continue to be rewritten. On the one hand, we commit to addressing conflict and misconduct with humble minds, aware of our own delusions, confusions, and not-knowing. On the other hand, we commit to continuing to grow in clarity, wisdom, and discernment as we strive to cultivate ethical community. We commit to working together to create a community that seeks safety and liberation, peace and growth, kindness and truth.

Adopted by the Chobo-Ji Board of Trustees: September 9, 2018

Revised: March 10, 2019