

DIAMOND SANGHA TEACHERS CIRCLE

Ethics Agreement (3/08)

As students of the Way and teachers of the Diamond Sangha, we aspire to right conduct in every aspect of our lives. In this aspiration, we have committed ourselves to maintain the Ten Grave Precepts, and we cannot improve upon them as guides and standards for our thoughts, words and deeds. The Precepts are open to interpretation, however, so with this Ethics Agreement, we establish a clear and specific set of minimum expectations to which we should be held accountable now and in the future. We hope that publicly specifying these standards of behavior will sharpen our awareness of ethical issues, ensure the trustworthiness of the Diamond Sangha, and serve to protect and perpetuate the Buddha-dharma.

We recognize that our work is founded on trust—the trust placed in us, each by our own teacher, to transmit the Dharma faithfully and the trust placed in us by our students to provide them respectful and appropriate instruction. In this document we concern ourselves explicitly with the latter trust, but we know full well that the two are inseparable; that is, we cannot hope to fulfill our responsibility to transmit the Dharma if we do not endeavor to live up to the Dharma’s ethical implications.

We understand that, in our capacity as Zen teachers, we may fail our students in many ways and to vastly differing degrees. At one end of the range of severity are isolated errors and instances of neglect; it is quite possible, for example, to disappoint a student keenly by forgetting to return a telephone call. While we consider even the slightest failure unfortunate, as fallible beings we will all inevitably suffer lapses of this sort and simply have to be forgiven. The failures that concern us more, that this Agreement is intended to address, are of greater severity—those that are demonstrably harmful to our students, either to their practice or to their general well-being, either to one individual or to a group. We commit ourselves to refrain altogether from such injurious conduct but especially from any that is intentional, repeated or protracted in duration, deceitfully concealed, exploitive of a student’s trust, or any combination of the foregoing.

To be specific, we commit ourselves:

- a) To use our power and authority as teachers to serve the interests of the sangha;
- b) To recognize the sangha as the highest authority in its own governance and to exercise discretion in our leadership so that we do not unduly influence decisions;
- c) To treat sangha members, including fellow teachers, with honesty and deep respect, not subjecting them to disparagement, coercive pressure, or undesired attention of any kind;

- d) To maintain confidences received from students, except as required by law or as explicitly permitted within the sangha;
- e) To practice openness and inclusivity in our relationships with sangha members, allowing personal affinities a natural place but avoiding destructive favoritism;
- f) To refrain from sexual interaction with members of the sangha, except within the parameters of a committed relationship and, even then, only with the utmost care to ensure that no one is harmed;
- g) Not to confer teaching authority, and especially Dharma transmission, on our lovers, spouses, siblings, children, employers, or known benefactors, nor to offer such authority as a means to attract, retain, or induce the cooperation of a student.
- h) To accept economic support (*dana*) from individual sangha members only when it is freely given, never making it a direct requirement for instruction or attention;
- i) To join with the sangha in practicing careful stewardship of its resources, not to enrich ourselves by misappropriation of sangha funds or properties; and
- j) To avoid the problems inherent in dual relationships, a Diamond Sangha teacher who works professionally as a psychotherapist will let at least one year pass before (1) offering instruction in the room to a former therapy client or (2) engaging in therapy with anyone he or she has been teaching in the room.

We ask our fellow Diamond Sangha teachers and the sanghas that we serve to hold us accountable to these standards.