

Insight Meditation Center (IMC)
Ethics and Reconciliation Council
Approved by IMC Board on April 7, 2005

Introduction

In 1990, teachers from Spirit Rock, Insight Meditation Society, and Gaia House agreed to an ethics and reconciliation procedure and a Teacher Code of Ethics to foster an environment of responsibility and integrity in the community. The following document utilizes this 1990 document as inspiration. As IMC continues to grow, it is appropriate for IMC to establish an Ethics and Reconciliation Council and a Teachers' Code of Ethics.

Guidelines

Conflicts will inevitably arise within the IMC community. The health of our community is not measured by the presence or absence of conflict, rather by our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate resolution of interpersonal tensions when they arise. The intention to attend to and learn from conflict is a clear application of Buddhist practice in our daily lives. Without this intention, practice can become simply a comfort rather than a deep transformative vehicle for our lives.

Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on right or wrong, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. Rather, it is based on addressing the suffering of all concerned. Hurt, fear, and anger are taken seriously through forums where everyone may speak honestly, safely, and completely about their own direct experiences and feelings. In seeking resolution, Buddhist practice values dialogue over silence, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, confession over accusation, and atonement over punishment. Because the process of reaching such resolution is often difficult, IMC's Ethics and Reconciliation (EAR) Council offers support.

The EAR Council is a group of three IMC practitioners, respected for their integrity, who are available to any community member requesting help in dealing with conflicts and grievances within the IMC community. The IMC Board appoints council members.

The Council's primary role is to provide confidential consultation to anyone with ethical concerns. The Council may function a) as a sounding board for a Sangha member's concerns, b) as a source of questions to facilitate deeper personal reflection, c) as a source of advice on how best to resolve the conflict, and/or d) to facilitate useful discussion between parties in conflict. To avoid compromising its role as an impartial friend to all community members, the EAR Council will not be involved in deciding individual disputes. Any Sangha member may approach any EAR Council member for consultation. The EAR Council member will notify the full Council, and the Council will determine how it can best be of service to the parties concerned and, if appropriate, the Sangha as a whole. Other procedures, such as outside mediation, may sometimes be recommended.

Grievance Procedure

An important function of the EAR Council is to encourage an intention of mutual respect and reconciliation when conflict arises in our community. In the rare occasion that a more formal process is necessary, the following grievance procedure is available.

1. Bringing a Concern

A formal grievance procedure is initiated by submitting a letter of request to the Council that includes:

- A statement that a formal grievance procedure is requested.
- The name of the person(s) whose behavior the complaint involves.
- A detailed description of the alleged behavior so the EAR Council can decide if the complaint is appropriate for initiating a formal grievance procedure.

- A history of attempt(s), if any, to resolve the complaint through other means.
- A general statement about the resolution desired.

2. Accepting the Concern

The EAR Council will decide whether or not to accept the request and will convey its decision to the parties within two weeks to the parties involved. As part of this notification, the Council will state its understanding of the issue under inquiry and will distribute a copy of the original letter of request to the party named in the complaint.

3. Forming a Grievance Committee

When a complaint is accepted, the EAR Council will select one of its members to facilitate a Grievance Committee to investigate, issue findings, and render a decision on the complaint. The Grievance Committee will be made up of three people selected from IMC's past and present board members. Each party to the grievance and the EAR Council will choose one person for the Grievance Committee. The EAR Council member who facilitates the meeting will not participate in decisions regarding resolution of the conflict at issue.

4. Investigating the Concern

The facilitator schedules closed hearings where all parties are given a chance to present their understanding of the issue under investigation. The Grievance Committee may question parties and request additional information. The facilitator will document the proceedings.

The Grievance Committee may ask other people to provide information pertinent to the complaint. All parties will have a full and fair opportunity to respond to all information – oral, written, or other – gathered by the Committee.

The proceedings and all pertinent documents will be held confidentially, not only for the duration of the proceedings, but in perpetuity, unless a court requires disclosure.

5. Committee Findings

When the Grievance Committee members are satisfied that they are adequately informed, they will review and discuss the case among themselves. At its discretion, the Committee may seek non-binding advice from any other source who agrees to hold the matters discussed in confidence. The Committee's decision should be reached by consensus. If unanimity cannot be reached, both a majority and a minority decision may be reached. Within two weeks of a decision(s), all parties will reconvene at which time the Committee will distribute copies of its written findings and read them aloud. For matters involving the potential suspension of an IMC teacher, the Grievance Committee may consult with the IMC Board of Directors or the appropriate committee thereof to jointly determine the best course of action.

Teachers Code of Ethics

Gil Fronsdal is IMC's primary teacher. This document will apply to the primary teacher and any teachers invited by the primary teacher to teach at IMC based on their activities of giving dharma talks, conducting interviews, and presenting classes.

IMC teachers recognize that the foundation of spiritual life rests upon our mindful and caring relationship to the life around us. In keeping with this understanding and for the long-term benefit of teachers and the community at large, teachers agree to uphold the five lay training precepts. We have specifically

expanded the scope of these five precepts to make them appropriate to our role as teachers of the Dharma in our specific cultural setting:

1) We undertake the precept of refraining from killing.

We acknowledge the interconnection of all beings and our respect for all life. We will refine our understanding of not killing and nonharming. We seek to understand the implication of this precept in such difficult areas as abortion and euthanasia. While some of us recommend vegetarianism, and others do not, we commit ourselves to fulfilling this precept in the spirit of reverence for life.

2) We undertake the precept of refraining from stealing.

We will not take that which does not belong to us and will respect the property of others. We will bring consciousness to the use of all of the earth's resources in a respectful and ecological way. We will be honest in our dealing with money and not misappropriate money committed to Dharma projects. We will offer without suggesting any sense of obligation on the part of the student to give.

3) We undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.

We will avoid creating harm through sexual misconduct and will refrain from all forms of sexual exploitation. Teachers with vows of celibacy will live according to their vows. Teachers in committed relationships or marriages will refrain from sexual involvement outside their relationships or marriages. Teachers will not use their teaching role to exploit their authority and position to assume a sexual relationship with a student. Specifically, with respect to relationships between a teacher and a student, we will abide by the following guidelines:

- a) A sexual relationship is never appropriate between teachers and their students.

- b) During retreats, formal teaching occasions, or interviews, any speech or actions indicating interest in a student-teacher romantic or sexual relationship is inappropriate. This applies to anyone in a teaching role, including senior students.
- c) If interest in a genuine and a committed relationship develops over time between a teacher and a student, the student-teacher relationship must clearly and consciously end before a romantic relationship begins. A minimum period of three months should elapse from the time when they mutually agree that their formal teacher-student relationship has ended. This understanding must be coupled with a conscious commitment to enter into a relationship that brings no harm to either party.

4) We undertake the precept of refraining from false speech.

We will speak what is true and useful and refrain from gossip. We will hold in confidence what is explicitly told to us in confidence. We will cultivate conscious and clear communication and the quality of loving-kindness and honesty as the basis of our speech.

5) We undertake the precept of refraining from intoxicants that cause heedlessness or loss of awareness.

Substance abuse is the cause of tremendous suffering. There should be no use of intoxicants at IMC, during retreats, or while on retreat premises. We will not abuse or misuse intoxicants at any time. If any teacher has a drug or alcohol addiction problem, the IMC Board of Directors will address it immediately.