

SOTO ZEN BUDDHIST ASSOCIATION



SZBA CODE OF ETHICS

As Soto Zen priests and members of the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA), we have committed ourselves to living an ethical life. Central to our vows are sincere efforts to provide a safe, financially stable, and ethically upright Zen center/temple environment for all members, Zen students, and visitors. This includes working to mitigate and, we hope, eliminate barriers based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, political beliefs, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, age, and ability/disability.

The Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts of Zen Buddhism below provide a basic ethical framework for all Soto Zen priests:

THE THREE REFUGES

I take refuge in Buddha.

I take refuge in Dharma.

I take refuge in Sangha.

I take refuge in Buddha, as the perfect teacher.

I take refuge in Dharma, as the complete teaching.

I take refuge in Sangha, as the perfect life.

I have completely taken refuge in Buddha.

I have completely taken refuge in Dharma.

I have completely taken refuge in Sangha.

The Three Pure Precepts

First are the precepts of restraint.

Second are the precepts of adopting good qualities.

Third are the precepts of benefiting all living beings.

The Ten Grave Precepts

First is the precept not to kill.

Second, is the precept not to steal.

Third, is the precept not to misuse sexuality.

Fourth, is the precept not to engage in false speech.

Fifth, is the precept not to intoxicate oneself or others.

Sixth, is the precept not to speak about the faults of others.

Seventh, is the precept not to praise oneself and put others down.

Eighth, is the precept not to be stingy with the Dharma or material things.

Ninth, is the precept not to indulge in anger.

Tenth, is the precept not to disparage the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

ETHICAL STANDARDS

While the Sixteen Bodhisattva Precepts are the foundation of the SZBA's vows, additional ethical standards and guidelines provide clarity. In summary:

1. Ethical Standards for the Association
 - a. The SZBA shall promote integrity, competence, respect for the dignity of all persons, as well as collegiality among its members.
 - b. The SZBA shall admit to membership and serve all qualified persons without discrimination, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, political beliefs, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, age, and ability/disability.
 - c. The SZBA shall recognize the equality of women, nonbinary, Black/Indigenous people of color (BIPOC), and LGBTQIA+ people and work to ensure their full participation in the community, education, leadership, and programs.
 - d. The SZBA shall work for the improvement and growth of Soto Zen Buddhism according to its mission.
 - e. The SZBA shall, in conformity with its bylaws, provide structures and resources to maintain its SZBA membership Standards and promote its educational programs.
 - f. The SZBA shall follow its bylaws, policies, and processes in holding itself and its members accountable to its standards for competency and ethical behavior.

2. Ethical Standards for SZBA Members
 - a. Soto Zen priests should:
 - i. maintain the confidentiality of the content of their conversations with students, unless to do so would violate the safety and well-being of another individual or be in conflict with the laws or policies of the state, an

institution, or the SZBA. *For a definition of confidentiality see [Section 3.e](#)*

- ii. comply with all laws, regulations, codes and ethical standards applicable to clergy where the Soto Zen priest is located, such as mandatory reporting laws;
- iii. safeguard property and funds of the Zen center/temple;
- iv. honor Soto Zen rituals and practices and respect variations and adaptations of Soto Zen rituals and practices;
- v. abide by ordination vows;
- vi. uphold the mission of the SZBA;
- vii. maintain an active relationship and good standing with the SZBA; and
- viii. inform the SZBA staff if absent from actively practicing and teaching Soto Zen Buddhism for more than two (2) years.

b. Soto Zen priests should not:

- i. engage in sexual misconduct. Sexual misconduct includes sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual harassment, sexual innuendo, or any pattern of behavior that would be perceived as sexual misconduct;
- ii. commit criminal offenses (excluding actions of civil disobedience). Member sanctions to be determined at the sole discretion of the SZBA;
- iii. engage in dishonesty, fraud, deceit, or misrepresentation;
- iv. engage in harmful conduct not otherwise specifically named in this policy.

3. SZBA Member Responsibility

a. Integrity

- i. The SZBA member relationship with practice students and temple members is founded on deep trust and respect.

- ii. The authority of the Zen teacher carries with it an increased responsibility to avoid situations and actions that could result in harm to the student, the community, and/or the teacher.
- iii. The responsibility for maintaining appropriate and clear boundaries rests with the Zen priest.
- iv. Members should not misuse status or authority to achieve privileges or other consideration or to inappropriately influence others.
- v. Members are to seek appropriate professional assistance for their own personal problems and conflicts, especially those that might impair their ability and judgment in providing spiritual care.
- vi. Members shall pursue ongoing personal growth and professional development through activities such as regular zazen, liturgical, and sesshin practice, academic study, development of spiritual care skills, and other areas that enhance their proficiency as a priest.
- vii. Members should not work in isolation but must be mindful of the need to maintain collegial and professional relationships and associations.
- viii. It is necessary for members to develop and maintain such relationships and associations for the purposes of maintaining supervisory skills, doctrinal and spiritual insights, educational acumen, and current knowledge of resources for priest practice.
- ix. Regularly participating in a priest support and accountability group is strongly recommended.
- x. Members shall take the steps necessary to protect the community and individual when they become aware that they themselves or another member is impaired or otherwise unable to maintain the SZBA Code of Ethics, including but not limited to: notifying all appropriate authorities; preventing the impaired member from

causing harm; and communicating with the SZBA leadership, the member's peers, the member's Zen center/temple board of directors, etc.

b. Qualifications

- i. SZBA members are not to claim directly or by implication any spiritual care, counseling/psychotherapy, or other professional qualifications that exceed their actual training, qualifications, or abilities.
- ii. Members are expected to make appropriate referrals for matters that go beyond moral, spiritual, or religious guidance or whenever the needs of temple members exceed those that can be competently handled by the member.

c. Member Responsibilities Regarding Consensual Relationships

- i. SZBA members must avoid actual or perceived sexual behavior and romantic relationships with all Zen center/temple attendees. This does not apply to an ongoing relationship that began before a member's ordination or with a person who was unaffiliated with the Zen center/temple at the time the relationship began. This does not apply to people between whom there is no power imbalance, who are clearly peers, *and* where their Zen center/temple has a policy on healthy ways to engage in romantic relationships between peers.
- ii. SZBA members must avoid actual or perceived sexual behavior and romantic relationships with those with whom they have or might reasonably expect to have a student-teacher or supervisory relationship, regardless of whether the relationship is consensual.
- iii. SZBA members must not directly supervise any practice student, employee, volunteer, or others with whom they have had a sexual or romantic relationship.

- iv. In the event SZBA members are not in compliance with the consent policy above, they should immediately:
 - 1. Terminate the teacher-student, supervisory, and/or spiritual care relationship.;
 - 2. Provide alternate SZBA-member/priest/spiritual teacher referrals to the practice student or alternate spiritual care referrals to the spiritual care recipient, as applicable;
 - 3. Provide this information to the governing body of the entity through which the SZBA member serves as a priest, or engages in student-teacher and/or spiritual care relationships (e.g. Board of Directors, SZBA staff, Teachers' Council);
 - 4. Provide this information to the Sangha/temple/membership of the entity through which the SZBA member serves as a priest, or engages in student-teacher and/or spiritual care relationships as required by the organization,
 - 5. Seek formal or informal counsel, such as from SZBA staff, senior Soto Zen priest(s), psychotherapists, or other professionals.
 - v. If at any time SZBA members find it difficult to uphold these standards, they should seek counsel, such as from SZBA staff, senior Soto Zen priest(s), psychotherapists, or other professionals.
 - vi. Members must report all violations of [Member Responsibilities Regarding Consensual Relationships \(3.c.\)](#) to SZBA staff, in accordance with [Self-Reporting Clause \(4.a.\)](#).
- d. Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility
- i. In order to make the Dharma accessible to all, Soto Zen members wholeheartedly commit to employ and serve all qualified persons without discrimination, regardless

of race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, political beliefs, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, age, and ability/disability.

e. Confidentiality

- i. Members should treat the content of all spiritual conversations as confidential, except as may be required by law. Be advised that:
- ii. If a person communicates an intention to harm themselves or others, this must be reported via appropriate channels to the applicable authorities.
- iii. If a person confesses to child sexual abuse or other abuse, the member can and should notify the applicable authorities immediately in accordance with the laws, regulations, codes and ethical standards applicable to clergy where the member is located, such as mandatory reporting laws for clergy. Members must be aware of and in compliance with all such laws, regulations, codes, and ethical standards applicable to them.
- iv. Consultation on confidential spiritual care conversations may be appropriate for members engaged in collaborative teaching models. Members who engage in such consultations must make every effort to ensure that such consultations take place only as-needed and shall maintain the confidentiality of the content of their conversations with colleagues about students to the furthest extent of applicable laws and policies of the state, institution(s), and the SZBA.

f. Fiduciary Responsibility

- i. Members should act in the best financial interests of the Zen center/temple and never use funds or assets that belong to the Zen center/temple without express written permission.

- ii. Members should provide accountable and transparent stewardship of Zen center/temple funds.
 - iii. It is improper to mingle personal funds of any kind with Zen center/temple funds.
 - iv. Donated items purchased from Zen center/temple funds are the property of the Zen center/temple, at least until such time as they may be given to the priest as a gift by the Zen center/temple members, in accordance with such Zen center/temple's bylaws.
 - v. Members who improperly use discretionary funds for personal use may be subject to income tax reporting requirements, as well as civil and/or criminal penalties.
- g. Drugs and Alcohol
- i. In consideration of a priest's position of authority, behavior with drugs, alcohol, and all intoxicants must be in alignment with the Soto Zen Precepts.
 - ii. Abuse of intoxicants is an ethical violation and is subject to the procedures outlined below.
 - iii. Should priests find themselves struggling to uphold this standard, they should seek professional help, as well as guidance and counsel from SZBA staff, and/or senior Soto Zen priest(s). They are also encouraged to seek peer and/or psychotherapeutic support.

4. Ethical Violations and Members' Obligations to the Soto Zen Buddhist Association

SZBA members have a special responsibility to ensure a safe practice environment for all Zen students, Zen center/temple members, and Zen center/temple visitors. All members registered with SZBA are bound by these principles:

- a. Self-Reporting Clause:
- i. SZBA members shall take responsible action when they become aware they are impaired or otherwise unable to maintain the SZBA Code of Ethics.
 - ii. Members shall provide SZBA staff immediate notice of any claim of unethical conduct made against them whether in their role as priest or any other role, regardless of degree of (in)formality of such complaint and regardless of the authority, court, organization, tribunal, or any other body notified. Absent a court order compelling the member to keep the content of such complaint against them confidential, members shall provide the immediate notice required in accordance with this section.
 - iii. If a member has been found by their Zen center/temple to be in violation of the SZBA Code of Ethics, they must immediately and no later than three (3) days of the Zen center/temple's release of such findings report this violation to the SZBA Staff and, if warranted, to the appropriate authorities in accordance with applicable laws. If the member fails to comply, in whole or in part, with the reporting requirements under this section, the Zen temple/center's board of directors or equivalent, authorized body shall cause any and all such reports required under this section to be made immediately.
 - iv. If neither the member nor their Zen center/temple comply with the section immediately above, a member not affiliated with that Zen center/temple may report that Zen center/temple's findings to SZBA staff and, if warranted, to the appropriate authorities, in accordance with applicable laws. Any member acting in good faith under this section shall not be subject to any defamation or other related claims.

- v. Members shall respond promptly and honestly to any commission or representative of the SZBA duly authorized to investigate their conduct.
 - vi. Failure to report or provide accurate, complete, and truthful information constitutes a violation of this Code of Ethics.
 - vii. SZBA members found in violation of the SZBA Code of Ethics may be subject to sanctions, including suspension of membership.
- b. Illegal Activity Clause:
- i. SZBA members indicted/charged with or convicted of a felony will be suspended subject to periodic review of their membership by the SZBA board of directors.
 - ii. At its sole discretion, the SZBA board of directors may at any time suspend, extend, or terminate the suspension of the member's membership, or remove the member from membership, during the pendency of the charge(s), and during any period of time up to and including post-conviction (such as sentencing, incarceration, and the pendency of post-conviction appeals).
 - iii. When all legal obligations have been met as determined by the judicial system, the member may apply for reinstatement.

5. Teacher-to-Teacher Relationships

As SZBA members, we agree to create and maintain respectful and collegial relationships with our fellow teachers.

- a. We agree to respect each other's priestly authority.
- b. When members entrust a practice student for part of their training to another member, the member receiving the practice student will be mindful that they are not the student's primary teacher and will refrain from giving advice beyond the scope of the entrustment. If the member receiving the

practice student is unsure whether they may be giving advice beyond the scope of the entrustment, they should immediately consult with the student's primary teacher.

- c. Should teacher-to-teacher conflict arise, we agree to create and maintain reasonable dialogue with each other.
- d. SZBA members agree to abide by the SZBA Transfer of Ordained Disciples Policy.

If SZBA members engage in conduct harmful or injurious to the goals, reputation, or interests of the SZBA, including bullying or harassment, the SZBA Board of Directors may, in their sole discretion, immediately suspend their membership, remove them from membership, or take other appropriate action.

The examples of the violations of the SZBA Code of Ethics listed above are not intended to be all-inclusive; in addition, the consequences of such violations are at the sole discretion of the SZBA Staff and Board of Directors.

Signature of SZBA Member

Print Name

Date