

## The MRO Ethics Committee

### What is the EC?

The Ethics Committee (EC) is a committee of the MRO Board of Directors that was established in 2019. It is empowered to: 1. investigate abuses of power and ethical transgressions that occur within the MRO; 2. facilitate sangha member's repair and restoration in response to harm; and 3. make recommendations to the teachers and Board to safeguard the sangha and the Order against future abuse, transgression and harm.

The EC reports to the Board and to Shugen Roshi in his capacity as Head of the Order. Although EC members are formal MRO Jukai students, their role in the EC is independent of the student-teacher relationship and hierarchy.

### Membership of EC and Recruitment of Members:

The EC is currently composed of three Board members who volunteered for the committee upon its formation: Bear Gokan Bonebakker, Degna Chikei Levister, and Prabu Gikon Vasan. Shugen Roshi and the other teachers are pulled into the EC as needed.

Moving forward, the EC looks to increase the committee size to allow for rotating membership and to achieve greater diversity and inclusivity. We hope to arrive at a five-person committee with the following configuration:

- all jukai students
- at least one board member
- at least one ordained monastic and one lay senior (who may also be the board member above)
- a diversity of identities with regard to race, gender, age, etc.

Once we have achieved the above, EC members will serve for staggered three-year terms, with the option of at least one term renewal. We hope these term guidelines will balance a continuity of experience with fresh perspectives.

The recruitment process will begin with a letter to all jukai students. The EC and the Board will vet students who express an interest in serving on the EC, and will select members per the above guidelines.

### EC Referral Process:

Any sangha member may refer an incident or concern to the EC. To do so, simply email the EC at [ethicscommittee@dharma.net](mailto:ethicscommittee@dharma.net). The EC will monitor this email address regularly and will respond to all emails in a timely manner.

### EC Deliberation, Recommendation and Review Protocol:

Upon receiving a referral the EC will meet to review the concerns, determine if the referral falls within the purview of the EC (see above), and decide on next steps. Typically, the EC will then meet individually with all parties to clarify the details of the referral, and to ascertain what the victim needs to heal, what the transgressor needs to learn, and what the sangha needs in order to prevent similar harm from recurring.

In situations involving an abuse of power, or where a transgressor has clear seniority over the victim, the EC will work to center the experience of the victim, to provide safety for the victim's practice within the sangha, and to support the victim in their attempts to articulate and seek redress for harm done. Similarly, the members of the EC are well aware of the impacts of racial and gender-based inequities, and will therefore incorporate these frames into their inquiries and understanding of the situation.

When needed, the EC may ask to speak with relevant third parties, for example a bystander who observed the incident, or individuals who have experienced similar incidents with the current transgressor. As noted above, the EC will pull in the teachers and training staff into these conversations as needed.

Based on the above, the EC will formulate and offer recommendations about how to address the harm done, how to restore harmony to the victim's experience of sangha and practice, how to educate the transgressor about the impact of their actions, and how the Order can prevent similar harms. The EC recommendations are generally given to Shugen Roshi for review, and then offered to the parties involved in the incident.

The EC will generally conduct a three-month or six-month check-in with the parties involved and training staff. The check-in will review the status of the recommendations to determine if the agreed-upon steps were carried out, if additional steps are required, and if the referral can be considered closed with regard to the EC. If seeking counseling was a recommendation for the transgressor the EC, as part of the check-in, may ask the counselor to fill a questionnaire about the transgressor's progress in the recommended areas.

### EC Records and Disclosure:

The EC keeps notes or minutes of each meeting and may forward these notes/minutes or a summary to Shugen Roshi and the other teachers to keep them informed of the situation. All EC documents will be stored securely to safeguard privacy. When the EC has decided that they are finished with a referral, records will be transferred to the Training Coordinator.

The EC updates the Board about incidents either in the quarterly Board meetings, or sooner if the event is especially egregious or time-sensitive or if the EC requires Board input. The EC may

elect to limit the details of disclosure to the Board in order to protect the identity of parties involved.