

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Table of Contents

- I. Overview of the Doshinji and Karenji codes
- II. Governing bodies of the MRO
- III. Ethical expectations of people who make up the MRO
- IV. Steps for addressing harm and reporting ethics violations:
 - A. Restoration and Repair guidelines for addressing conflict
 - B. Reporting misuse of power, unethical behavior and unethical incidents

Foreword

As our sangha works together to create harmony and benefit and diminish harm and suffering, guidelines are needed to provide ethical clarity for all who practice in the MRO. In 2019 a committee of the board was formed with the goal of reexamining the past ethical guideline framework to bring it up to date and in alignment with the ways in which the MRO and our society are evolving to center equity, transparency and accountability. Religious training within the Sangha relies upon a profound commitment on the part of teachers and students to deeply study, realize and actualize the teachings of the Buddha. This requires that each person, while in training at any training center or affiliate within the MRO, practice in accord with the Buddhist Precepts, the Doshinji Code (Zen Mountain Monastery Rule) and the Karenji Code (Zen Center of New York City Rule). In addition, all monastics are expected to practice in accord with the MRO monastic vows. When this is done faithfully, the sangha dwells together in a way that is mutually supportive, trusting and peaceful.

The intention behind these guidelines is to create shared understanding about the responsibility entrusted to guests, provisional students, formal students, senior students, monastics, transmitted priests and teachers in the MRO because even in the context of spiritual training, issues or conflicts based in wealth, sexuality and power arise and each person has varying levels of responsibility to the Sangha and the Dharma.

I. Overview of the Doshinji and Karenji Codes

The Doshinji Code, the Monastic Rule for Zen Mountain Monastery, and the Karenji Code, the Rule of Fire Lotus Temple, are guidelines for harmonious communal living in a religious community. Everyone who practices at the Monastery or Temple is expected to follow the guidelines outlined in the Doshinji and Karenji Codes, and they are especially applicable for the residents in each training center. Both codes are included in the appendix to this document.

II. Governing Bodies in the Mountains and Rivers Order

Teachers' Council - The Teachers' Council is made up of all active MRO teachers, defined as those who have received Denkai, Shiho (i.e. monastics) or Dharma Transmission (i.e. lay). The Teachers' Council examines and discusses matters relevant to MRO training. Functioning as a collegial group, it serves to offer both support and accountability for and between the teachers.

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Monastic Council – All ordained monastics are members of the Monastic Council. The Monastic Council meets with students who are in monastic discernment, and deals with issues of disharmonious behavior by or amongst the monastics.

Board of Directors – The Board of Directors for the Mountains and Rivers Order is composed of 16 active MRO jukai students. The Head of the Order is the Board President. The Board of Directors' general function is governance, which includes providing general accountability to help hold sangha leadership accountable to the Sangha and financial oversight in order to maintain the financial health of the Order. This is done by holding quarterly board meetings as well as *ad hoc* meetings when necessary as well as by the creation of sub-committees, such as the Ethics Committee, to assist with management and MRO governance. Membership is for a 4 year term. New members may be suggested by any board member, are discussed during meetings, nominated by the President, and then voted on by the active members of the Board.

Council of Elders – The Council of Elders is composed of all active MRO teachers, all active senior students, and the members of the Board of Directors. The Council of Elders would be called upon in a situation such as is described in the MRO Grievance Procedure.

Guardian Council – Senior students are invited to serve on the Guardian Council provided they are "actively training," i.e. fulfilling the criteria for being both a training student and a senior student of the Order. The Guardian Council meets with those asking to become formal students, and those asking to enter into residency at the Monastery for a period of longer than a month. The Guardian Council also addresses violations of the Doshinji Code by residents.

Ethics Committee – The Ethics Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Directors, is composed of a group of 5 MRO students including at least one ordained monastic, one lay senior, and one board member. New members are chosen by the Ethics Committee and approved by the Board of Directors from among active MRO jukai students. The Ethics Committee strives to contain members who represent a diversity of professional and personal experience, as well as gender and ethnic diversity reflective of the equity goals of the MRO. The Ethics Committee serves to address any ethical issue that goes beyond the purview of the Guardian Council or the Monastic Council. These include any abuse of power such as bullying, sexual harassment, or other allegations of inappropriate or biased behavior, any threat or fear of violence, allegations of harassment, theft, threatened destruction of property, ethnic, gendered or racialized allegations and any allegation that might have legal ramifications for the MRO.

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

III. Ethical Expectations for People who make up the MRO

MRO Trainees: Formal MRO Students, Provisional Students & Guests

The Bodhisattva Precepts are essential to all aspects of Buddhist practice as they guide each practitioner in how to *cease from harm and actualize good for others*. They are based in the *skillful means* on the path of liberation - rather than based in beliefs in absolute good and evil - and so teach us how to be morally responsible and compassionately accountable to ourselves and each other, and to do so without a shaming or punishing attitude. All trainees are expected to practice in accord with the Buddhist Precepts and the Doshinji and Karenji Codes.

MRO Senior Students and Monastics

MRO Senior Students - both monastic and lay - are, as part of their ongoing training as Seniors, given various responsibilities and roles of authority that bring them into contact with other practitioners and trainees in ways that create perceived and actual 'power differentials.' Therefore, senior students carry a special obligation to practice the Precepts well and are expected to strive for and model healthy interactions with all who practice within the MRO. Each Senior should treat visitors, junior students and one another with compassion and respect. They are expected to be particularly aware of any interactions they have that might be perceived or interpreted as an abuse of power, sexualized or harassment. A sangha member in any position of authority – including Monastics who are not Senior Students - should also be keenly aware of and concerned for how their actions and behavior within the sangha have a greater impact on other sangha members. (See Doshinji Code, section "Relationships" & Karenji Code, sections "Relationships" & "Sexual Harassment"). No MRO teacher, priest, or monastic should engage in any explicit or secretive communication or action with a student, trainee or guest which has the intent—or gives the appearance—of initiating any type of sexual encounter, or an intimate relationship.

Head of the Order & MRO Teachers & Priests

The Head of the Order and all active, authorized MRO teachers and priests have the greatest responsibility to uphold and embody the spiritual and ethical virtues of the Buddhist teachings and Mountains and Rivers Order training. Therefore, it is wholly appropriate for the sangha to expect the Teachers to act fully in accord with all training Rules, Codes and Precepts of the Order.

Teachers and Priests should adhere to the **Rules of Service and Selflessness**. This means to live in service to the Three Treasures—Buddha, Dharma and Sangha—and to live selflessly with regards to authority and power. While teachers and priests are empowered to teach the Dharma—and so carry spiritual authority within the sangha—this should never be used in ways that bring harm to the sangha; this includes individual persons, the entire community and every organization within the MRO. The various governing bodies within the MRO (Guardian Council, Monastic Council, Board of Directors, Council of Elders, Ethics Committee) all serve to balance

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

this power, providing degrees of checks and balances between the teachers and priests and sangha and provide opportunity to resolve conflicts.

Ordained Teachers should adhere to the *MRO Monastic Rule of Simplicity*. This means to live simply with regards to material objects and money, while being appropriate to their functioning and responsibilities as a Priest, Abbot, or Head of the Order.

The Head of the Order has access to, and control over a Contingency bank account, as authorized by the ZMM Board of Directors. The Contingency bank account is a checking account that is part of the cash assets of the MRO, is seeded by student donations, and is for the discretionary use of the Head of the Order as authorized by the ZMM Board of Directors. The monies in this account are not the personal property of the Head of the Order and the account is reviewed regularly at quarterly ZMM board meetings.

Ordained Teachers and Priests should not have any other personal wealth, except in such cases as, for example, receiving social security payments. In these cases, the money may either be given away or deposited into one of the MRO bank accounts. Any family inheritances are to be refused or given away as donations.

Lay Teachers are expected to live in a way that is materially and financially appropriate to their life as a lay teacher and practitioner in the world, while being in harmony – in spirit and action – with a life based in non-attachment.

Ordained Teachers and Priests are expected to adhere to the **MRO Monastic Rule of Stability**. This means to live a solitary life (i.e. without an intimate or sexual partner) or to be in a committed, monogamous relationship. No MRO teacher or priest (ordained or lay) should engage in any explicit or secretive communication or action with a student, trainee or guest which has the intent—or gives the appearance—of initiating any type of sexual interest, encounter, or intimate relationship.

If a Teacher wishes to initiate an intimate relationship with another person, they may not do so with any active formal student, resident or practitioner within the Order. They may, however, initiate an intimate relationship with a person outside the practicing MRO sangha. In this case, they should be open and honest with their Teacher and with the sangha about their relationship. An exception to this rule would be if both parties formed a relationship as practicing students (i.e. were equals within the MRO training), and subsequently, one of them completed their training and became an authorized Teacher or Priest.

Any teacher who receives sexual advances from a trainee is obligated to directly and unambiguously tell them that such actions are detrimental to the student's spiritual training and will not be allowed. The teacher should make a written, dated note outlining the advance, which should be stored confidentially in the Training Office, and they should immediately communicate the actions with the Teachers' Council and Ethics Committee. If the student is

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

unable or unwilling to stop such actions, they should be directed to work with another MRO teacher or be asked to discontinue their training within the MRO.

IV. Restoration and Repair: A Process of Addressing Injury through Intentional Dialogue

The aspiration and practice of the Sangha treasure is harmony. This aspiration includes recognizing, holding and skillfully attending to disagreement and conflict.

The Restoration and Repair process, created by the MRO Ethics Committee, provides a method for engaging in intentional one-on-one dialogue when conflict arises, with the aim of restoring relational harmony. We encourage sangha members to use this document to initiate and deepen dialogues, to responsibly give and receive feedback about relational harm, and to function as witnesses for dialogues.

Restoration and Repair is not a substitute for bringing forward ethical concerns or transgressions that require the attention of governing bodies, such as the Guardian Council, Monastic Council, or the Ethics Committee. Any practitioner within the MRO who believes a teacher, monastic or student is or has misused their power, sexuality, financial or material resources should report their concerns to the Ethics Committee.

V. Reporting Misuse of Power, Unethical Behaviors and Similar Incident

Any practitioner within the MRO who believes a teacher, monastic or student is or has misused their power, sexuality, financial or material resources may report their concerns to the Ethics Committee by emailing ethicscommittee@dharma.net.

Naturally, it is important that any person seeking a formal process be clear in their intentions and actions, so as to avoid any frivolous accusations.

Any sangha member who becomes aware of an action by another sangha member that transgresses these Ethical Guidelines and/or the Rules of the Monastery or Temple, may bring this action to the attention of the Guardian Council, the Monastic Council, or the Ethics Committee.

In the event of a situation that is not specifically addressed in these guidelines, the teachers, seniors, sangha and Ethics Committee will need to rely upon their maturity, intelligence and correct practice of the Dharma to determine the most appropriate response in a manner that embraces the principles and spirit of these guidelines, which is to promote the co-creation of a mutually supportive, trusting and peaceful sangha.

MOUNTAINS & RIVERS ORDER ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Glossary:

Doshinji: Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, NY

Formal MRO Student: A practitioner who has passed through the five gates of entry, namely:

- 1) Participation in an Introduction to Zen Training Weekend retreat
- 2) Completions of a week-long intensive (sesshin) at the Monastery
- 3) Meeting with the Guardian Council
- 4) Completing Tangaryo, a dawn to dusk day of concentrated zazen.
- 5) Requesting the teachings in private interview with the student's teacher

Guest: A guest is any person, both student and non-student, who is not in residential training or a registered participant in a workshop or retreat.

Karenji: The Zen Center of New York City, also known as the Temple.

Practicing Members: The Practicing Member program was created for those wishing to develop and maintain a relationship with the teachers and sangha at Zen Mountain Monastery and the Zen Center of NYC, but without the requirements of a formal MRO student.

Provisional Students: Residents at the Monastery and Temple for a week or longer are considered provisional students during their period of residence.

Senior Students: Those MRO students who have served as shuso/chief disciple for an angō.