

Albuquerque Vipassana Sangha (AVS)
Ethics and Reconciliation Council
Approved by AVS Board of Directors on April 20, 2014

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 that document as inspiration, as well as similar policies adopted by other Vipassana sanghas and insight meditation centers.

In response to continued growth of the Sangha and with the intention to encourage mutual respect and reconciliation within the Sangha community, the AVS Board of Directors now establishes an Ethics and Reconciliation Council.

Guidelines

Conflicts will inevitably arise within the AVS 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, disclosure over accusation, and responsibility over punishment.

Because the process of reaching such resolution is often difficult, the AVS Ethics and Reconciliation (EAR) Council offers support.

The EAR Council is a group of three AVS practitioners, respected for their integrity, who are available to any community member requesting help in dealing with conflicts and grievances within the AVS community. The AVS 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 AVS'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 Grievance Committee procedures 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, 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 a teacher who has led any Sangha-sponsored activities, the Grievance Committee may consult with the AVS Board of Directors to jointly determine the best course of action.