

The North Carolina Zen Center Code of Ethics

One mark of Zen practice has been the colorful and counter-intuitive way teachers have sought to foster in their students a realization of the Buddha's teachings. The Rinzai school is known as the 'shouting school.' Zen literature is full of examples of monks boxing each others' ears and hitting one another with sticks. These actions made sense to practitioners working in a particular cultural context and with a discerning knowledge. In the United States, we have been challenged to learn anew: How do we point to that which cannot be pointed to? The last words of Master Kozen Daito admonish students: "Study hard! Study hard!" Drawing on lessons learned from more than half a century of sangha life in the United States, the members of the North Carolina Zen Center turn to the lay precepts for assistance in how to study hard.

1. We undertake the precept of refraining from killing.

In undertaking this precept we acknowledge the interconnection of all beings and our respect for all life. We agree to refine our understanding of not killing and non-harming in all our actions. We agree to refine our understanding of the myriad lives that selflessly join us in our effort to erase subject-object distinctions and the suffering caused by those distinctions.

2. We undertake the precept of refraining from stealing.

We agree to not take that which does not belong to us and to respect the property of others. We agree to be honest in our dealing with money and not to misappropriate money committed to Dharma projects. We agree to approach people in a spirit of equality, without regard to one another's financial circumstances. We agree to refine our understanding of the relationship between practice and our desire for material goods.

3. We undertake the precept of refraining from false or hurtful speech.

We agree to speak that which is true and useful and to refrain from or interrupt gossip. We agree to hold in confidence what is explicitly told to us in confidence. We acknowledge the power of speech and our power as individuals, both to assist and connect, and to damage and separate, by our timing, choice and tone of speech. We agree to refine our understanding of skillful and compassionate speech.

4. We undertake the precept of refraining from sexual misconduct.

We agree to avoid creating harm through sexuality and to avoid sexual exploitation or relationships of a sexual manner that are outside of the bounds of the relationship commitments we have made to another or that involve another who has made vows to another. We agree to refine our understanding of our self-interested role in our most intimate relationships.

Additionally, we assert that teachers with vows of celibacy will live according to their vows. Teachers in committed relationships will honor their vows and refrain from adultery. We acknowledge that single teachers in our community may develop healthy partnerships and marriages with former students, but that great care and sensitivity are needed. We agree that in this case the following guidelines are crucial:

- a. A sexual relationship is never appropriate between teachers and students nor is intimation of a future student-teacher romantic relationship.
- b. If interest in a genuine and committed relationship develops over time between a single teacher and a single student, the student-teacher relationship must clearly and consciously have ended before any further development toward a romantic relationship. Such a relationship must be approached with restraint and sensitivity. A minimum time period of three months or longer from the last formal teaching between them, and a clear understanding from both parties that the student-teacher relationship has ended must be coupled with a conscious commitment to enter into a relationship that brings no harm to either party.

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

It is clear that substance abuse obscures the mental clarity that practitioners seek and causes tremendous suffering. We agree that there should be no use of intoxicants during retreats. We agree not to abuse or misuse intoxicants at any time. We agree to refine our understanding of the search for a release from suffering.

Teachers and students alike at the NCZC are encouraged to apply these precepts as an ethical guide to behaviors that lead toward realization of the Buddha's teachings. Sangha members who believe an individual associated with the NCZC has behaved in a way contrary to the Code of Ethics are encouraged to refer to the Center's Grievance Policy.